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A Simple Story

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SAINT HELENA, LITTLE ISLAND
M. A. Aldanov

CHILDREN OF THE AGE
Knut Hamsun

STRAIT IS THE GATE
André Gide

A SIMPLE STORY
Charles-Louis Philippe

THE PITIFUL WIFE
Storm Jameson

BUDDENBROOKS
Thomas Mann

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BLACK BRYONY
T. F Powys

DON JUAN
Azorin

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A Simple Story

by Charles-Louis Philippe

1874 - 1909

Translated from the French by
Agnes Kendrick Gray,
author of *River Dusk*

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Franz Masereel

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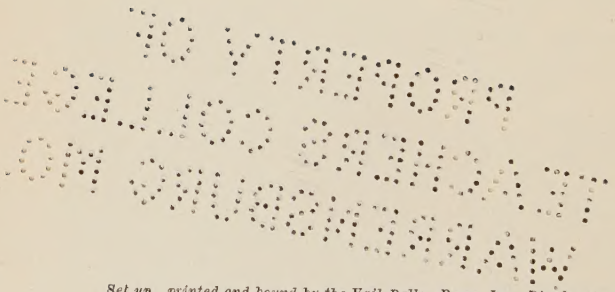

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Part One

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Chapter One

AND the doctor said:

"Come now, my poor Perdrix, it is better for me to tell you exactly how things are. For a month you have worn your dark glasses and they have not helped you. But what could you expect? Reason it out for yourself! There remains but one course—you must stop work entirely; otherwise the heat and glare of the forge-fire and the strain of watching the iron will bring on total blindness. In time, rest may cure you without drugs or an operation. But continue to wear your glasses."

It was thus Dr. Edmond spoke, and there had been no answering protest—the gentry are so unreasonable! The doctor might have shouted, as he had once done in a farmer's home: "In God's name, if you don't take my remedies, you'll die!" Father Perdrix replied:

"Very well, sir. It shall be as you wish."

As soon as they were alone, Mother Perdrix began:

"What does this mean, what does this mean? That you must not work any more? Then, *mon Dieu*, what will you do?"

But the old man, who was not patient, exclaimed:

"Be quiet! Give me a little peace, can't you?"

She seated herself upon a small bench but, being a restless woman who could never sit still, she only perched there, her hands doubled under her chin, twitching her head about as she watched him; waiting, yet fidgeting every moment. He, seated in his chair, with his legs thrust out and his hands hanging at his side, stared at the floor, the brim of his hat pulled down to serve as a shade for his eyes.

After all, it was better to say nothing. He moved the toe of his sabot along the flagstones,

which even in well-swept houses retain a thin film of mud, and this he scraped off—he busied himself with scraping it off. My God! he thought; never to have been sick and now to have this menace to his eyes! Again he stared at the wood of his sabot, until his eyes hurt and filled with tears, as always happened when he looked closely at an object.

He had said one evening:

"I don't know what is the matter with my eyes. They burn."

His wife had answered:

"Doubtless, in striking the iron, a spark flew in."

At the same time it was very strange that both eyes should have suffered! And day by day the trouble had continued, so much so, that he at last decided there was but one thing to be done—he must see the doctor. The doctor gave him drops, and morning and evening three had been put into each eye. But they had had little effect, and only brought down jokes upon him.

"See here, uncle," said his nephew, Pierre Bousset, the wheelwright, "you haven't done as Father Toiny once did, have you? The doctor wrote him a prescription and told his wife to see that he took it. Later, when the doctor again

visited his patient, he asked if he were better now. The wife replied: 'Really, doctor, I see no change. But then, what can you expect from so small a piece of paper in the body of such a man?' "

Yes, yes, make your jokes! Again Dr. Edmond came, and said:

"Keep up your drops, but I am going to put you under observation. You must absolutely do no work for a week, in order not to strain your eyes." Little Jean Bousset, Pierre's son, was a university student, and the old man said to him:

"Tell me, Jean, what does it mean, 'to put under observation'?"

At the third visit, Dr. Edmond ordered him to wear smoked glasses and continue to rest. And the fourth time, which was to-day, he found the malady no longer in doubt and there was nothing to be done.

Thus evil falls upon the labourer in the midst of his toil. The gentry are but rarely sick, they who have all the time needed to care for themselves. Father Perdrix's old brain was bewildered. There was a ringing in his ears. The thought of his disaster buzzed like a great fly about his head and fastened upon his forehead. It was this sense of calamity which bowed his

head with its silly fancies, and set him mechanically scraping the floor. He was worn out, like an old beast of burden—for we are but old beasts of burden. . . . Work, work, galley-slave, and fall dead at the end! He was conscious of but one idea, which remained still unformulated in the very depths of his being, but weighed upon him like a physical reality, like an idea of lead. It did not move freely, as do our thoughts when we converse, but fastened upon all his body—upon his joints, his limbs, his feet which scraped the mud on the flagstones, and his head. Shutting out all other thought, it remained, like an idea of brass, like a roaring, like a vast and monotonous sea. . . .

"I am not even fit to take care of the pigs."

There is only work for us. For fifty years he had swung the hammer above the anvil, as one should, for life consists of hammer and anvil. His body held its power, and he felt his whole strength still hoarded in his back, ready to respond and strike. We desire to earn our bread with the iron of the forge, and since bread is life, we are willing to give all of life in order to have bread. Ah! Perdrix no longer scraped the floor with his sabot! Seated in his chair by the window, his hands clenched against his mouth, he

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neither moved nor spoke, like an old, bowed, suffering wolf, unwilling to complain. And how hard it is to sit still! He gave no thought to the suffering; one might well lose one's eyesight if one had the wherewithal to live! He gave no thought to the night of the blind, whose world is like an endless black wall. The doctor had said: "In time, rest may cure you without drugs or an operation." Oh, what matters the cure, when it is only with rest that the doctor can cure? If it is a question of no longer working, we would rather see nothing than stare at our misery.

Until now, a home and a forge had composed Perdrix's life. His dwelling was an old village house, whose roof was slowly settling like men whose backs give way, and its façade was broken by two windows with small panes, which lent but little brightness to the room inside, for in the country, light is so common it does not seem a precious thing. The gable-end wall held rings to which horses were tied while being shod, and gave on a lane, ending in the gardens. The forge was installed in an annex, and the house offered certain conveniences because of the courtyard, which contained an oven, the dungheap, and the rabbit hutches. These—his surround-

ings—were as much one with his body as old habits or the motion of his limbs.

The main room was large and shadowy, with dark rafters on the ceiling, two beds, set end toward end, and separated by a cupboard; familiar possessions in every corner; baskets hung from the heavy beam, the potato coffer, the scythe between one window and the door, and the mirror between the door and the other window. There were old chairs, known by their names, and the round drop-leaf table which stood in the middle of the room and gave an impression of being the mistress of the house when she was absent. The beds had curtains of yellow-flowered red cretonne, and these alone would have kept the room from appearing bare.

Within the forge he had hammered iron for thirty years. At the time of his marriage to Françoise, when he was thirty-three, he had set up this little shop in the rear of his home, for a blacksmith's establishment is costly and not everyone has the necessary funds in advance. Jacques and François, his two sons, had learned their trade there. This work of shoeing horses is hard and even dangerous, because of blows from the animals' feet, but when one is strong all trades are alike, provided one can thereby earn one's

bread. Moreover, they had not fared badly since Jacques had succeeded in getting on the railroad, where, as he was ambitious, he had become an engine-driver. As for François, he was hired out and was not a bad workman—aside from the fact that he was fond of his glass.

Perdrix had also taught apprentices who remained with him four or five years, until they were of an age to command a man's salary. He shod the horses of the farmers, after which he went with them to drink a glass of wine, and he had also a good clientele among the gentry, for his wife had been a maid-servant and the gentry prefer to help their own. Thus he succeeded in earning his three francs ten sous, or four francs a day, which was fine indeed for our little district.

The thought of that lost happiness came to him in this crisis, when all the woes of mankind seemed to gather in his brain and to revolve there like pictures of hell. But all our lives we are expecting this! Labourers do not look too far ahead; all goes well while they have strength; afterwards it is soon enough to consider the matter. Thus there is always in the mind a corner reserved for misfortune where, one day, it may enter and feel at home. We are even surprised

at the thoughts that come to us. There were, for example, two old people often seen passing through the town. The man was totally blind and walked tranquilly, leaning upon his wife's arm. They covered almost all the communes of the department. We gave to them because they were of our class, and because they were very neat. They talked with us, and neither the man nor the woman was extravagant in speech. It was the same story—misfortune had befallen him. "Of course we are given charity everywhere," they said, "because we are known, but he who must beg is most unhappy."

Perdrix remembered other beggars who had passed, those whom he saw and those whom he imagined. His soul was with the beggars and followed them all along their roads, from begging to begging, from commune to commune. He recalled the old white-bearded men, with the large sacks weighing them down, who nevertheless climbed the road and went away upright. He recalled the big jovial fellows who strode vigorously along with strength enough to work, and who, of course, stopped for a friendly glass at the "Pickled Pork." He recalled the young wanderers, who were merely lazy, because, when one wishes it, work is always to be found. He

recalled the very thin old tramps who trembled in the wind, went with small bent steps, as if longing to be blown out like a candle. He remembered the poor wretch who had fallen dead upon the road and whose body, exposed at the town hall, had attracted thither all the townspeople. There the old man had taken little Jean Bousset, who had never seen death. He had held the child by the hand, saying to him: "Don't be afraid, Jean."

With these thoughts rolling about like stones, his head thumped and resounded like a cart. Huddled in his chair, he held his head between his hands, so heavy and full it threatened to drag down his body. The voice of the deluge, the sound of great waters seemed to fall upon his senses in this visioning of all human woes, as in the night, at the crossroads of the winds, the roaring of wild beasts seems to follow or await you. Then he brought himself up suddenly, because if one thinks of these things their horror eats slowly into the soul. He shook himself and, raising his head, murmured again: "Ah! One might almost say, I can see what is coming!"

The little town stretched out among the meadows, calm and untroubled as one who leans

at ease upon his elbows. In the pure air of the fields it lay along the slope of a hill, clean, smiling, and at rest. It could be seen rather far down the road at the end of an avenue of poplars, with its tile or slate roofs, and perspective lent importance to the little houses of the lower quarter which vaunted themselves like talkative tradesmen. However, the town hall was the dominant feature, a town hall of stone, square and rigid, the pride of the people, built in the style of law and order. The cemetery pines, the park elms, and the trees of many gardens, everywhere formed masses of foliage in whose shadow human life should go on, equal, poetic, and composed of manual tasks tranquilly performed. The large and well-kept streets, bordered with white façades, intersected and defined blocks of houses rather thick, ageing and repainted, whose souls remained like their roofs, ancient and unchangeable. Only the street to the church was dark and carried a faint odour of sewerage to the square. The church was an old Roman edifice, surmounted by a thick bell-tower, and before which the loveliest plane-trees in the world spread their branches protectingly over the stones. From this church pealed forth the summons of old, and it exhaled a peace of past

time, a memory of our grandmothers who spun wool and thought of God. And it was thus that the little town with an innocent face assumed ingenuous manners, like a deceitful woman.

Lost in time, the hours hung above her, in the monotonous blue of the sky, and from morning to evening fell, drop by drop, into the houses where the demands of trades and households occupied life and seemed life itself. One year had seen the town hall constructed, another the building of the girls' school; later the fair-grounds had been levelled. Each family had some famous date of marriage or death, some purchase or sale, some memory of fortune won. Sometimes there came from Paris a story from the *Petit Journal*, a picture of the president of the Republic, or photograph of the Exposition which made us realize that we are fortunate in being Frenchmen. Sometimes, through the passing centuries, came a new influence, obscure and confused, and, penetrating the established order of things, aroused anger or fear. Grave men talked of socialism and the sharing of property, declaring: "If to-morrow I should divide with Martin le Frisé, who is a drunkard, the day after it would all have to be done over again." They remembered Gambetta; they recalled that Victor Hugo

had said: "I believe in God, but I do not love the priests." And the Parisians were hot-headed fellows, who wished to bring about a revolution. They spoke with authority in a limited environment, where words flung back their own echo, and seemed to issue from the depths of human wisdom.

When Boutron the hatter had his last daughter christened, at the baptismal dinner while the women were chattering: "And you know they say there is . . . ," the men held serious conversations. Blanchard the grocer and Grados the sexton had been invited in for coffee. Said Boutron:

"My strongest point is astronomy. I know the name of every star in its time."

Blanchard replied:

"My strongest point is arithmetic. I can make calculations in my head without the mistake of a centime. But my weak spot is geography."

Then Grados the sexton rose, as to the call of God, and broke in, shouting:

"That's my strongest, that's my strongest!"

Thus they knew the fundamentals and the world was without mystery.

There were two classes of workmen: the poor

and the well-to-do. The poor workmen followed the trades of weaver or sabot-maker, while their wives nursed the numerous offspring trailing at their skirts, and roamed among their neighbours' houses, saying: "Well, I haven't even had time to change my dress. Just see what a sight I am! And I still have to make a pair of breeches for Baptiste. When you have children, you are never done." Some had good trades, such as shoe-making, in which it is not difficult to earn one hundred sous a day. And not working hard, at that! They spare themselves and have everything they wish. "Ah, yes," they say, "we let things go as they will." And likewise they do not hesitate to give offence; but go where you will, you are sure to find them: in the café and in all the pleasure gatherings.

The well-to-do workmen lived in neat houses, with crystallized ideas in every corner of the room, which show on the furniture, sit on the table, and boil with the water in the pot for the morning and evening meal. Fixed in their attitude of work, they turned with the hands of the clock round a vital centre of order and economy. Wisdom drawn in a straight line bordered their lives. This they called having a mind to get on

in the world. Finally, there were the gentry. The gentry were as important as noise, riches, and knowledge. Their houses had drawing-rooms, stables, and gardens. They visited one another and spoke with trained voices, because they had gone to school to learn fine manners and to lose their accent. They had servants and horses, and these seemed to enlarge their lives and bear them along smoothly to all pleasures, as if they rode always in a carriage. Some were democratic and shrewd. These were more approachable to the workmen, and chatted in a familiar way in the street, having known them from childhood, when they went to the community school. They frequented the café like everyone else, and were friendly. Of course one was polite to them: "Listen, Dr. Edmond, you are right, but I want to tell you one thing. . . ." Others of the gentry were reactionary, and their sons became officers. They lived a family life and their wives were ladies who kept their rank. They gave work to the labourers, whose children attended the Sisters' school, administered their estates, and yet dear me, one was never sure of the gentry! In any case, this is what happened to Bonnet-le-Mutin.

Bonnet-le-Mutin's meadow touched the broad

acres of Monsieur Lalande. One day his pig escaped into his neighbour's field. A man cannot always be watching his stock! But Monsieur Lalande called Bonnet-le-Mutin and stated his case.

"See here! Your pig broke into my field and my overseer has complained of the damage. I do not wish to hale you into court, so we had better settle the matter amicably between ourselves. Give me one hundred sous and I will be satisfied. But, by God, take care in the future."

Bonnet-le-Mutin said all that he could, but in the end he had to submit, for when the gentry set their heads . . .

A week later the overseer's whole flock of sheep swept into Bonnet-le-Mutin's field. He ran to Monsieur Lalande, exclaiming:

"Tell me, sir, at one hundred sous a head, how much would that be? However, since I wish to live in a neighbourly way, only return to me my hundred sous—but another time I will know what to do."

The little town was divided and classed by a social science as important as human science, in which there were distinguishing categories and definite principles, as in natural history, where

money served as a basis, like the vertebræ, and raised a man in the scale of existence. Only a few individuals—large merchants and rich farmers—made the transition from one species to another, for, although money has a moral value, certain usages of good form and long-standing wealth are, nevertheless, necessary—or a wood-seller's son would equal a lawyer's. Of her servant whom she had dismissed, a lady made this statement:

"He earned six hundred francs a year. It was a fine position—at least, for that class, it would be called a fine position."

The little town had grown up like a plant in the country. No one knows how they spring into being, these little towns with no mine, no river, no railroad near their sites. We can understand the reason of the villages, where the human family paused one day to settle down in the midst of the fields, where the baker, the grocer, and the sabot-maker were born. Little towns, on the contrary, seem a sort of confusion between the village and the city, having pretension mixed with poverty, a nameless something that brings to mind a notary's vain clerk. The Senate House quarter was its very essence, where the merchants, seeming more firmly rooted

and substantial than elsewhere, read the papers, talked politics, and gravely discussed the acts of the municipality. Formerly, in the days when the Republic was taken seriously, the Senate House quarter was the nursery of municipal councillors, and it was here that Gambetta had left so many traces.

The other quarters were not homogeneous, and there order, poverty, and wealth touched elbows in a close contact: the poor who asked, the rich who could give; the labourer who did his work and the labourer who let things go. These formed a community where life went on under its neighbour's eye, where diversity of classes destroyed moral unity, and scandal flourished like a great tree which spread its branches above all passers-by. The little town, forgotten by events and buried in silence, listened to the buzzing of insects and kept these idle noises in its empty head like important memories. Casement curtains concealed watching eyes, the barking of dogs had echoes, and life which slept for very boredom, waked at each sound, like a policeman who lies in wait and seizes upon you.

Chapter Two

It was very strange that Dr. Edmond Lartigaud should have visited old Perdrix before his breakfast, but after all the house was only two steps away, and it is worth making an effort in order to earn forty sous. Ordinarily he did not go out until after eleven o'clock; he had to take his ease, otherwise it would not be worth while to have a fortune. He breakfasted at ten. To rise at six, breakfast at ten, dine at six, and retire at ten, would make us live to ten times ten. However, he never rose before nine.

Dr. Edmond Lartigaud was a tall, stout man of forty-nine, vigorous and important. He carried himself well, and he was a joy to his tailor, because his clothes produced their full effect. There was a definite formula by which certain persons were described: "He is a fine man—in the style and figure of Dr. Edmond." Descended from a wealthy family, he walked with a firm step, a true son of those who range the fields with hunting-boots on their feet. Men of middle-class stock were recognizable by a certain boldness of carriage, recalling their great-grandfathers who, at the time of the Revolution, bought an estate for a pair of oxen, and strode through the streets of their village in the first pride of land ownership.

Dr. Edmond had an oval face, terminated by a long pointed chin, which he thrust forward when he broke into a hearty Ha ha ha ha ha! *Bon-vivant*, his large girth was nevertheless unlike that of newly rich contractors. In the two generations which separated him from the soil, a natural selection had taken place, forming a man accustomed to ease, who, while still bearing the imprint of his race, knew how to carry his head, his body, and his hands.

At the age of twenty-nine, having completed

his studies, he had succeeded his uncle, the doctor. He had taken the place while it was still warm, sat down in the comfort of a well-to-do bachelorhood, and, as he was content with hunting, good dinners, and little glasses of cognac, complete satisfaction soon rang in his loud laughter. His uncle was an old bachelor who lived with his housekeeper and was ravaged by gout. Dr. Edmond seduced the housekeeper's daughter when she was sixteen and, in order to taste all the pleasures at one time, shut himself up with her in the evenings, eating and drinking. As a result there were two children, Paul and Georgette, who resembled him; and, as a further result, Marie-Louise, who also wished to know pleasure to the utmost, drank all day while awaiting Dr. Edmond. He soon had the gout, which he declared was traditional in his family. Finally Paul reached the age of ten; it became necessary to send him to high school and, in order that the child might be like the others, a son of the gentry, his father married Marie-Louise, despite the white wine. Time passed; her face was spotted with red and she saw nothing of the other ladies because she was unpresentable, but she comforted herself with the thought: "It's all the same to me. I am richer than they are."

Dr. Edmond sat in the dining-room, where the table was laid, and sampled the sardines while awaiting the others. Presently Paul and Georgette entered, greeting him: "Good morning, Papa! Good morning, Papa!" for Dr. Edmond was always in a high humour at table. Madame Edmond scarcely ever appeared at meals because the bottle of white wine was kept in a kitchen cupboard, where she could have a taste while walking, looking, and bustling about. Her servant habits remained under her skin like a disease of childhood.

The plates were brought in. They ate the fish and shared the steak, but at last, as one piece still remained, Paul said: "Give it to me, Papa," but Georgette broke in, crying: "No, Papa, to me." Dr. Edmond cut the morsel in three pieces, took the largest himself, and exclaimed: "There, my little pigs, fight for your food!" Georgette, who was quick, seized the plate. "Well done!" and to unfortunate Paul was left the last piece, no larger than a nut.

At this point Marie-Louise appeared with potatoes *au gratin*. Dr. Edmond served three large spoonfuls and paused, saying: "Poor old Daddy Perdrix. I told him to-day to stop work."

Paul, who was eighteen, sipped his morning

Picon bitters and thought of the afternoon with its glasses of beer. Georgette thought of nothing. Marie-Louise, in the days before she was Madame Lartigaud, had frequented her neighbours' homes, where the meals were chiefly of bread and soup, and, as she was inclined toward the pleasures of the stomach, she had realized the misfortune of being poor. Then, too, white wine induces emotions of the heart.

"Poor old man," she murmured.

Dr. Edmond continued: "Little Jean Bousset has just learned that he has been accepted at the École Centrale," and he looked at Paul. But Paul said nothing. He had his own thoughts. Georgette pricked up her ears, for she was sixteen and Jean Bousset eighteen. Many emotions were stirring within her, and she cast general glances upon the young people of the town, whose ardours might match hers.

Said Marie-Louise: "He is not like our great stupid, our lazy good-for-nought!"

"Don't pay any attention to her," exclaimed Paul. "You can see that she's drunk."

Having failed to secure his bachelor's degree in rhetoric, Paul had been sent to a school to be coached, returning the following winter with serious bronchitis. He had recovered rapidly,

for he had the appetite of an animal, but remained quite as simple as one, with an air of watching flies. His father laughed loudly: "Just hear what she calls you!"

Marie-Louise, who had gone out, returned with a plate containing little fish. Her generosities loomed large to her, and the white wine only increased them.

"I shall take them a plate of fish. That is better than wasting it."

Dr. Edmond smelled the dish and replied:

"Perdrix is a fine old man."

She covered the plate with her apron and departed, saying presently to Mother Perdrix:

"See! here is a plate of fish for you. Dr. Edmond said that you must not be afraid, you will be cared for!"

Having drunk his coffee and cognac, Paul strolled out of the dining-room. From breakfast to dinner lay a stretch of seven long hours, during which he seized every experience, held each minute before flinging it behind him. Hunting was forbidden because of the heat and cold. He chaffed the maid, moved about the house, loitered upon the doorstep, stopping the passers-by, and roamed the streets on familiar terms with all who loved the cafés. He knew

every place in which he could drink, and frequented these, but never remained for long, because something else always caught his attention. His appetite was a king that ruled and guided his life, recurring with the persistence of a fixed idea, leading him to one house where the table was laid, to another where a glass would be offered him, or into any café, where he could obtain credit.

After leaving the dining-room he made a tour of the courtyard, then thrust his head through the door: it was half-past eleven. Noticing the Perdrixes' house, he strolled down and greeted the old man:

"Will you drink a glass of beer with me?"

Father Perdrix accepted, although he did not like beer. They went to the "Pickled Pork," sat down at a table, and stared each at his glass, while Perdrix told his story.

"It's true, then," murmured Paul. "Well, don't be afraid, old fellow; you will be looked after."

Ordering another canette of beer, he poured it into the glasses, drank his in little sips, and seemed to absorb a minute with each swallow. Finally, when he judged that the moment had come, he paid and rose:

"Good-bye! I'm off now."

At last, he could go to the Boussets'.

The table was laid and all four, Pierre Bousset, his wife, Jean and Marguerite, seated about a large potato-cake, were at dinner, feasting on success and glory.

"Jean dear!" said his mother. "You would think I had expected it, for I had just made the potato-cake!"

She had hurried at once to the school to tell the news to Marguerite. And Marguerite recounted the story:

"The Sister Superior came into the class, and said, 'Marguerite Bousset, your brother has passed seventy-fifth into the École Centrale.' As for me, I turned absolutely white. And 'That is splendid—the son of a wheelwright,' she said."

Paul passed the window and Pierre Bousset exclaimed:

"There is Paul Lartigaud."

Pierre was annoyed at being thus disturbed during his meal, which, with the temperament of an economic workman, he did not like to share, yet dared not refuse. Paul entered, with his

continual laugh, which lent him assurance.

"Ha ha ha! Here we are at table. Eating a potato-cake. Fine. You are happy!"

Everyone said in the same breath:

"Do sit down, Monsieur Paul."

Jean Bousset felt his happiness enlarged by the presence of someone to behold it, and, thinking of the day before, when he was not yet "a student of the École Centrale," he felt triumphant over time and men.

"You will have a piece of cake, will you not, Monsieur Paul?"

Paul shook his head, with his foolish laugh.

"No, thanks, but I hope you are going to wash it down."

The potato-cake was warm and golden, its crust tender because the parents had but few teeth left, and morsels thick with butter melted in the mouth. After a bite they drank a great swallow, to give zest to it, then ate again until they were satisfied.

Pierre Bousset was receiving the reward of his sacrifices, and thinking: "How angry the gentry must be!"

His wife said aloud:

"Is it not splendid, Monsieur Paul? Indeed,

there was not another accepted in this region."

Pierre Bousset, the wheelwright, was five and a half feet tall, with a frame strengthened and hardened by his trade, though slightly bowed under his fifty-two years, as a branch bends under a weight. He was a son of a widow, and had passed his early years at school, where he learned but little—for the poor have many ways to fill their time—at rich funerals where alms were given, at the distributions of the Charity Bureau, and in the streets, among the other unfortunates who have but one bare room, and search the gutters for bread and coppers.

Once a well-to-do grocer sent him upon an errand a mile and a half away, to the Estate of Grand'Font, and when he returned said only: "Thank you very much, my boy." The poor child thought of all the wear and tear upon his sabots. Another time, when an uncle had stopped for a visit, his mother sent Pierre to fetch a bottle of wine. The innkeeper grumbled to his wife: "That, to be drinking wine, *that!*" When he wandered through the streets of the town poorly clad staring into space, the inhabitants said: "What a bad little boy he is!"

He loved his mother with a sort of fury, and was always saying to himself: "By God, when

I am a man—" He became an apprentice of his uncle the wheelwright, who was quite willing to take him without pay. His aunt, knowing his poverty and meekness, in order to prevent his eating too much during meals, tucked the bread away in the bin upon which she sat. Sometimes he earned a few sous by running errands and knotted them in the corner of his handkerchief. Once every month, on Sunday, he went to see his mother, covering the ten miles on foot, and carried her his savings. There were some months when he brought as many as thirty sous.

At last, his apprenticeship ended, he worked in the neighbouring towns, where, with his comrades, he carried on a rivalry as to who could work the hardest. For a few times, at first, they took him with them to the inn on Sunday, and made him pay, because, being thrifty, he should certainly have money. When he had protested upon several occasions, they invited him no more and heaped him with scorn.

"We'll not take you again. You're a dog and everyone knows it."

He learned that the world is as hard as the iron he worked, shaping our destinies with harsh blows, and that sometimes we must bend our shoulders lest we be broken. He retired into his

own thoughts, lived to himself, and kept watch upon his purse. At the age of thirty-one he married a thrifty, hard-working woman, set up for himself, and as he was one of the best workmen in the region, quick and conscientious, custom came to him as to an established firm. Two children, Jean and Marguerite, were born to them, four years apart, and because of them he felt even greater happiness when he went to deposit money with the notary. In twenty years he had accumulated forty thousand francs. Jean, who was always first in his class at school, secured a departmental scholarship, which enabled him to study for the high school, and also to hold first place there. When he took the examination for the École Centrale and was passed seventy-fifth, there were cries of joy: "Oh! he has never failed in any examination."

Paul sat down at the table without further ceremony. Marguerite was also eating, and her round little serious chin was moving, in the manner of a person who walks deep in thought. Paul regarding her, observed:

"You like potato-cake, don't you?"

She was fourteen years old and hid none of her emotions.

"Indeed I do. I like it very much."

They had taken part in a wedding together, he as best man, she as maid of honour. Such an occasion draws young people together and tinges their natural feelings with a little more than friendship. He had fallen into the habit of bringing her all sorts of small things, such as candies, and she had come to expect them. Moreover, Paul always carried some sweetmeat tucked in his pocket for his own pleasure.

"And do you like peppermints?" he continued.

"Of course," she returned. "Have you some in your pocket?"

He brought them out, exclaiming: "Oh, you know all my secrets!"

Meanwhile Pierre Bousset was pouring out the wine. He would gladly have made everyone happy. He was a man who knew constant deprivation, and for whom happiness consisted in not depriving himself. He said to his son:

"You are not drinking. Come, have a glass, my boy!"

Then came the moment for the coffee, and Pierre Bousset again offered the drink. When they had finished, Paul wished to take Jean off with him. But Jean's father thought: "He has had all he needs. It is useless for him to roam

about the cafés all the afternoon. That is the way to ruin his health and give him a bad digestion." Aloud he said:

"No, Monsieur Paul. He must leave for Paris in a week, and I have much to say to him. And also the tailor must measure him for a new suit, and his mother prepare his clothes. He will come to see your father this evening."

Paul rose and bade them adieu.

Shortly after, Marguerite went back to school. She had not wished to go at the same time as Paul, for his appearance was ungainly. Then the father, mother, and Jean took council around the table.

"My son," began the father, "I am very happy, I am very happy indeed. You know that I have made many sacrifices, but up to the present I have had not reason to complain. There was once, to be sure, a note from the headmaster saying: 'A certain tendency to resent discipline,' but I took that for the natural folly of a boy. However, you must no longer conduct yourself as a little boy. And you can now realize how much we are doing for you. Ah, poor Marguerite will always be left behind. But she is not jealous. She has been very happy in your suc-

cess. Brother and sister do not agree so well in all families, and, after all, we will recompense her with her dowry when she marries.

"You are going to Paris. We have applied for a scholarship and I think we shall receive it. You must always be economical, for economy is the most important consideration! Here in our countryside there are men of small trades who, by dint of saving, are able to put something aside. It is the same in lesser matters as in greater. Think of your Uncle Perdrix. No one could call him a bad man or a waster. But true it is that he loves his cups and has always a pipe in his mouth. I do not speak of Mother Perdrix, who is, on the contrary, a thrifty woman. Perdrix had a blacksmith's trade, and it would have been easy, for it is one of the best trades in our district. If he had been careful, he would now be well off, instead of being only fit for the Charity Bureau.

"Always keep yourself well in hand. I have no advice for the day, as you will be in school at that time. But every evening go back to your room and work. You know better than I what you will have to do. Beware of all women. Sometimes you will meet them in the street and

they will only serve to lead you into trouble. Or else you might catch some evil diseases, and once you have them in your blood they remain. And you already have rather a frail constitution. I do not mean that you must have no friends, only not too many. You had friends at the high school; we have entertained them here during vacations, and have been kind to them. They seemed good enough boys. But you have seen many times among us that friends are only good to borrow money, and often you lose what you lend. I will send you one hundred and twenty francs a month, which should give you no cause for complaint. That will make four francs a day. Be careful in your spending and, above all, borrow from no one. Once you become entangled in debts, it is hard to get free. And when one's purse is empty, one always borrows right and left. I much prefer, if you should be in need, that you ask me. But consider the matter well, my son, for you have seen how hard I have laboured in order to put by a little for the future. I earn my living by work.

"Always obey your masters. You must be submissive to authority. Sometimes there are brutes who will mistreat you, but do not answer them rudely—be polite always. Finally, they

will have a change of heart, and will think, 'After all, this young fellow does not answer back. I was wrong perhaps in being so rough.' Sometimes it is of such men that close friends are made, because not all of them are wholly bad. And then they may be useful to you. Never grow angry. Do as the men of Auvergne. You see them here when they come to sell their wares. 'Clear out of here, you thief, you robber!' we say to them and they go away without a word. Then, when they have made a tour of the town they return and say to us, 'But listen, sir—' We listen, and often they twist us around and sell us things we have not wanted to buy. Never be angry; it is far wiser, for of what advantage is false pride?

"Finally, my dear son, do the right thing. Do not listen to those who would give you advice, for you might be led astray. There are only too many here who would be happy if you turned out badly. My God, if you committed follies, there are those who would be happier than if they were given twenty francs! There are many people who are vexed at your success! I have always said: 'They complain that the children of the upper classes have all the jobs, and then when they see a workman's son who wishes to

improve himself, they do all in their power to thwart him.' By heaven, do you see another man in this region who is doing for his children what I have done for you? I hear them saying, all these fine gentlemen, at the barber's on Saturday: 'Let our children do as we are doing; let them work!' They deprive themselves of nothing. They go to Paris to see the Exposition. Lord! A hundred-franc note apiece is not enough for that!

"My dear son, what I have said to you is for your own good, and later you will find this is true. Well, it is now half-past one. I must go back to work."

Chapter Three

For a long time the misfortune of the Perdrixes lay heavily upon their neighbours. Like a story told at night that frightens children, it hovered over their sleep, a dark and menacing shape, an unknown power, barring their way, as if to thrust them back into hopeless poverty. Each one felt its presence about his house, feared to find it a guest at his door, and saw through the window some brushing wing, some immensity of Fate which prowls about the roof, threatening to descend and destroy without warning. Regrain, the sabot-maker, had five children,

and as he ate his potatoes and drank his water, he felt hungry mouths stirring about him and thought of the good fortune of those who had potatoes to eat. For a week the bottle of brandy stood empty in the cupboard, and neither he nor Annette had the courage to go only two steps to the grocer, where a pint might be had for nineteen sous.

Déry, the shoemaker, who had six children, drank wine, coffee, and liqueurs, smoked his pipe, had his clothes made for eighty francs, shook his head like a fat matador, and deprived himself of nothing, because he was like that. But each bite, each swallow, seemed to him an excessive luxury, a folly.

With courage shaken, hopes unsettled, the poor of the town sought by words and actions to brace themselves, assuming an attitude of bravery while facing the future. Some wore the hopeless look of dogs that bay the moon; to every home came that moment of presentiment which often precedes calamity and makes one say when the blow has fallen: "I was sure of it."

Perdrix and his wife, motionless in their room, questioned the four corners of the horizon, studying the probabilities, gathering themselves together before beginning a campaign. At sixty-

four they were building their lives upon new ground, upon quaking ground, and, trembling themselves to feel the earth trembling under their feet, they were prepared for any calamity—vertigo, a fall, or being swallowed up. They drew closer together, realized that they were man and wife, of one flesh, two bodies under one roof. Until to-day he had been the blacksmith who smote and the master who commanded. His arms were raised, his meals were prepared at the hour he wished, he ate at his pleasure. Until to-day. Now he began to comprehend a woman's life, the little details of skirts and old jackets, the organization of a household, the gesture of hands that arrange and put in order. In his hard head, without knowing it, he understood the word of the Gospel: "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder." This is sometimes forgotten, and in it lies the unity of the woman and her husband.

Mother Perdrix washed her face, combed her hair, put on a neat bonnet, and set out to interview the ladies of the town. She was a simple woman and did not consider herself. She went without hesitation, but her husband—seated in his chair, his head down and his hands hanging between his knees—when he imagined her arriving

at a house, blushed to think of the words she was speaking. The ladies received her standing, in the kitchen, and they were always busy. They listened to her, then exclaimed: "Very well, Mother Perdrix." They had the soft voices of gentlewomen and assured speech, because with their money they were accustomed to have everything move according to their pleasure. One of them gave her a winter overcoat, almost new, which did not fit her husband. The ladies of the château, who were very charitable, and who each Saturday gave two sous, and sometimes wine, to all the women of the Charity Bureau, made her promise to visit them often.

But the old man said later: "I suffered very much in growing accustomed to these things. At first I wanted to hang myself. I would say to myself: 'That would be better than to plead poverty.' But I didn't, because of my children. The world is so stupid, people would have said: 'You're nothing but the son of a man who hanged himself.' "

They were listed at the Charity Bureau, which was at least a beginning. Every Saturday they were given ten pounds of bread, exempted from taxes, participated in the distribution of alms: five francs on the 14th of July, fifteen francs on

St. Martin's Day, because of the quarterly rent, and at the beginning of winter they received a cord of wood. Besides, having been a maidservant, Mother Perdrix found means of subsistence, and was given work at once, because she was known to be energetic.

At the home of Roux, the baker, whose wife needed the time to serve customers and watch the till, she took service as a housemaid. Every morning, at nine o'clock, she went to make beds, sweep, dust, and polish the furniture, returning to her home at eleven, having earned five sous. She was a little too quick, threw herself too ardently upon things, and was employed only in order to help her, for in reality she was clumsy in handling furniture.

Every Saturday afternoon an elderly widow, Madame Delphine, had a great housecleaning, and as her maid was not enough, she employed Mother Perdrix. In this way fifteen sous were earned. It was a good house; the old woman had always her glass of wine, she was urged to carry home sorrel, or fruit, and when they were in season, Madame Delphine would say: "Now Mother Perdrix, go out and pick some beans in the garden." Sometimes she did washing, but that was not convenient, on account of her house-

work at the Rouxs', since she could hire herself for only half a day.

Fortune was with her. About this time Roux's mother-in-law became partially insane. Mother Turlaud owned two houses and, having dismissed her two tenants, could find no one willing to live with her, and care for two unused houses. This question occupied her for a long time, and so troubled her that she could see no way out. She remained bewildered. At first she would say to her daughter: "I am lost, lost." Later, a vague remembrance of something read, some tale of a labyrinth, became fixed as a confused picture in her mind. She rose, walked, and gesticulated, crying: "I am in La Byringue! I am in La Byringue!" They tried everything, they reasoned, finally they resolved to have her watched over. During the day she remained in her children's living-room, where there were always people about, but at night she could not be left alone in her house. Mother Perdrix was engaged. Every evening at eight o'clock she went to the house, put the old lady to bed, and slept on the couch at her side. A light had to be kept all night. Sometimes Mother Turlaud sat up in her bed, waved her hands, clawed the air, and sighed: "I am in La Byringue! I am in

La Byringue! Oh, dear God, I am in La Byringue!" Mother Perdrix would try to calm her: "Why, no, Madame Turlaud, no, no! Look, this is your room! Don't you recognize me? I am Mother Perdrix. Come now, lie down and rest."

But sometimes all this kept up for a long while, and there were many sessions during the night. Finally, Mother Perdrix would earn her twenty sous.

At noon the old woman and her husband ate their lunch. If there were no potatoes, it was because there were beans. Each one drank water from a mug, white mugs with blue ornaments. Upon the old man's was inscribed, in red letters, the name "Suzanne," and upon his wife's the name "Louise." They ate very fast with large iron knives, bought for six sous, knives which could cut thick slices of bread, but which cut only small bites of cheese. And immediately after her lunch the old woman took a basket, put on her shabby yellow hat, and went out into the fields to gather dandelions and watercress. She very quickly learned to know the meadows, the springs, streams of water, and slopes. She opened the gates, climbed the fences, got through

the hedges by pushing them down with her heels, and there was always some thorn or tear in her skirt.

She walked rapidly, bending down and plucking the dandelions almost violently, earth clinging to the joints of her fingers. Her old hands grew rough clay-coloured, and as thick as clods. Her jacket and skirt became tinged with yellow, and with a nameless something, that floated about and blended her with the autumn colours by the roadside. She laboured like a driven animal, stooping for long hours, and returning home out of breath, about three o'clock, after which she poured everything into water, sat down, and sorted her dandelions or cress. The next morning she vended her wares about town between seven and eight o'clock, went into the houses, and at first gave good measure in order to build up a clientele. It was not unusual for her to sell ten to fifteen sous' worth.

They were both astonished to find so many resources, and also surprised to see their life changed. The shadow upon their house lightened, the sky cleared, and they could breathe beneath it. There were conflicting emotions, however, which returned to them, ravaging their old

hearts like gusts of wind that blow among leaves. The old woman was not so acutely aware of them, because she walked fast and her steps trod her thoughts underfoot. But the old man remembered the events of the first day. Little Jean Bousset had come to see him. He had just been admitted to his school to become an engineer, but restrained all his joy before his uncle and dared not think of the École Centrale in the face of such tragedy. He had blue eyes like a little girl, and a blond lock of hair on his brow. He had kissed the old man, exclaiming:

"Oh, poor uncle! Oh, poor uncle!"

And Perdrix had replied: "My boy, you have just been accepted at your school. You will not be a wretched old man like your uncle."

"I am happy for you, Jean," his aunt had said. "Always be thrifty. You see what it is to be unable to work any longer at our age."

Both had kissed him, and, when he had gone, they said to one another: "We love him as dearly as if he were ours."

A vague damp autumn, whose fine rain sifted through the thoughts of men, followed upon the heels of their misfortune. Old Perdrix sat in the house by the window and, watching the road,

saw the rain and felt it falling, interminable and omnipresent, like an idea that forces itself into the mind.

One day he evolved a way to kill time and, taking his wheelbarrow and spade, went out upon the roads. He was well situated for his purpose, as his window faced directly on the street.

"There are the oxen from the Faix Estate," he would say to himself. "I must follow them or someone else will be there ahead of me."

Sometimes an ass or a horse would leave refuse almost in front of his door. Then the old man would rise, seize his spade and a basket reserved for this use, and go out and gather it up, casting his eye about to see if there were also other harvests to be made. When the rain fell, he awaited the end of a shower, went out to his door, studied the weather, and departed between two clouds, like a servant of refuse, a slave of the dunghill. He threw everything upon the heap in the courtyard, adding also straw and all kinds of waste, saw the pile grow, and later sold it when the time was ripe.

Then came winter, strewing white frost upon the grass in the country, and upon the mossy roofs of the little town. The days diminished and seemed to draw closer under their hoods, like

the old who are chilly. The cold fell from the low sky, approaching like a person who knows you, and touching you with a bony hand. There was a stock of wood in the attic and the stove was installed in the centre of the room, a little cast-iron stove, low, with a shelf for warming the feet and two lids that could be removed for the pot. The old man seated himself for the winter before the stove. He was chilly, having lived beside a forge, and his only move was to rise sometimes to feed the fire. This he did without economizing, as an exercise, as the only distraction that remained to him. Throughout the winter he sat there. The room was too large, and dampness covered the floor to the foot of the walls. He drew closer, until the stove was between his knees, and leaning his elbows upon them, twisted his neck to look about, with a sense of disquietude. Then suddenly there came to him the pleasure of repose.

In a blacksmith's trade iron smites iron, fists grow hard as hammers and are raised as in combat against a nameless something, like daily bread, which resists you but is conquered. In a farrier's trade the horses are your struggling adversaries, and you hold them with all the strength of your back. Perdrix sat there, his

muscles weakened, in a sort of forgetfulness, sometimes remembering his labour as one remembers pain, in order more fully to appreciate his rest. He would bend forward, abandoning himself to a sense of comfort that thrilled his being and brought a sigh to his lips: "Ah! là!"

In the morning he could not remain in bed, being one of those dry old fellows who sleep little and live long. He then took up his position for the day, not even being disturbed at eleven o'clock when his wife returned to prepare their meal. He sat down at the table only long enough to eat, and replaced his chair by the stove as if that alone were his business in life. On the whole, the day seemed short, because he had nothing to do, and feeling it gliding slowly along, gave himself up, that its course might carry him to evening. For work is a curse, and it was in driving him from Paradise that God had said to man: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." He also grew too lazy. For example, the old woman went often into the forest to gather dead branches. Obviously that is woman's work, but paupers cannot be proud. Since he could see well enough to walk and to gather refuse, the faggots also should have been his work, or at least he could have taken his

wheelbarrow and gone to meet his wife at the edge of the woods.

It was at this time that his adventure with the Blonde came about. Perdrix had rabbits; there were hutches in the courtyard where he raised them. Twice a day, morning and evening, he tended his charges, slowly to pass the time, and it pleased him to gaze about the courtyard and out into the street. Now the Blonde lived in the opposite house. She was an old wretch who could get on with no one. She had been married the first time for twenty years, and quarrelled always with her husband, who, by dint of eating only potatoes, had acquired a small property which he cultivated himself. He finally fell ill of exhaustion and kept his bed for a long time, while his wife tended him impatiently, railing at him: "When will you give up your black old soul?" At last he died. Then she sought to remarry, but no one would have her, in spite of her money. She was approaching sixty, when she encountered a man of forty-five, who had run through all he had, and felt himself wretched enough to cope with the devil. They were married, but at the end of a week he found her too hard and could get nothing from her but abusive language, so quickly returned to his former com-

panion. The Blonde remained all alone, rented a room, and barricaded herself therein, like an old animal not fit to live with people.

So Perdrix, returning from his rabbits, had lingered in the street, and the Blonde's door chanced to be open. He remained where he was, and like all who have little of interest about them, gazed at her door from an old habit of looking at everything. The Blonde came out, exclaiming:

"Why are you staring at me like that, you old lazy-bones?"

There are words that fall like stones, striking us to our depths, bending our backs, crushing us.

"What did you say?" he answered.

"Old lazy-bones!" she repeated. "Old good-for-nothing! You have no right to look in my house."

"Ah!" he replied. "Stop, or else there'll be trouble!"

But she flung back at him: "Well, come on then, old lazy-bones, old one-eye! You aren't even fit to hunt your bread."

"Oh, you think I'll not come!" He was breathing like a wild animal, with a growling that came out by jerks. She took a step into the street, while he advanced and slapped her full

on the mouth with the whole force of his arm. Blood spurted from her nose in a stream and flowed down her throat.

"Oh, my God, you old murderer!" she screamed. "Oh, my God, he's disfigured me!" Then she continued: "Ah, you'll see, old wretch, I'll go to the police. I want you to end your life in prison!"

She strode away, shaking her head to right and left, the blood flowing freely and spattering her face like a fury.

"Heavens! What's the matter?" she was asked on her way.

"That old jail-bird has killed me. I'm going for the police," she answered, running.

She arrived. "Yes, sir, look! He hit me and blood's coming out of my head."

The policemen answered: "Very well." But when she had gone, they hurried to the captain, who dismissed them. "Don't go," he said. "We can't concern ourselves about everything. The Blonde—Perdrix—and all such, are only rabble and are always quarrelling."

Three years passed and old Perdrix did not go blind. Doctor Edmond, when consulted, replied:

"Ah, no! No imprudences. You may seem

to be cured. But work? No, no. The forge-fire would be hurtful to you."

His was a life without aim, and made up of added days. Nothing was bad, because of habit, but on the other hand, nothing was good. Formerly he had known the peace of evening rest after toiling with the iron; and to sit, to sleep, to revive for the next day—this in itself was an aim, which separated the night from the day and seemed to give zest to life. But this endless rest, this idleness entering the flesh, this very disintegration of the flesh through idleness! Time flowed by—senseless and monotonous as the sound in a shell that echoes the waves on the beach—and droned through his head in its meaningless flight. Time slipped away, like stray dogs that trot with drooping ears.

When the weather was fine, he lived upon his bench, a massive bench composed of a thick plank laid upon four rough props. The street ran almost due east and west, and just at four o'clock in the afternoon the sunlight fell upon the old man's house, and the shadow in the street was that of the houses opposite. At the earliest hour he brought his bench out to the street and seated himself to share the events of the morning. The housewives swept their door-steps, threw dust

into the street, or dirty water into the gutter. The first two years, on seeing him, they used to say: "After all, it's very sad to have to sit there and not be able to work." But eventually they had enough. The third year they said: "It makes you angry to wear yourself out working, and to see that old bluffer sitting there on his bench." Sometimes he sat up like everyone, at other times half reclined. At four o'clock, the shadow having moved, the bench was carried back and placed in front of Perdrix's house. All day long the man was there with his smock, his heavy birchwood sabots, his wide black hat and white beard. He had been strong and tall, but had grown thin, and his cheeks had become hollow.

He was as much a part of the street as the sidewalks, the house-fronts, the shadow, and the sunlight. The passers-by gave him a word, as one gives a glance. He grew so much accustomed to this that those who did not speak to him he thought snobbish—so much accustomed that to deprive him of his greeting seemed an injury.

"I see you are resting," an acquaintance would say, and he would answer: "Oh, dear, yes." Sometimes the speaker added: "It's a fine day."

He also found distraction in the children.

There were two or three women in the neighbourhood who had babies continually, among them the wife of Regrain the sabot-maker, and the wife of Déry the shoemaker. Since they were not always of a mind to work, they came to see him, stationed themselves near, and gossiped. In vain he repeated: "But do sit down!" They always replied: "You fancy that I've nothing to do. I've more than I can finish and I'm wasting my time chatting!" He rose, held out his arms to the child, and broke into hearty laughter when it seized his beard with its tiny fists. Children loved him dearly. Those who were a little older loved him, above all, because of his dark glasses. Moreover, they were sent to play near him. The mothers would exclaim:

"You are bothering me. Go and find Daddy Perdrix." They knew that with him there would be nothing to fear. When a vehicle passed, he watched the children, calling out to them: "Be careful. You'll be run over."

In the morning, about seven o'clock, came Limousin the wheelwright, Pierre Bousset's assistant. He halted by the bench, stretched himself, and yawned for the last time, before going to work.

"That will never make you a gentleman of

leisure," observed the old man, but Limousin replied:

"Oh, well, after all, their bones must ache from sitting still."

Then he departed, but in such a manner that he seemed to take one step forward to two backward.

Immediately afterwards the milkmaids passed.

"Ah, my curly dear! Come here and let me kiss you!"

Milkmaids are busy girls, and they answered, as they hurried on:

"Wait until I tell your old woman."

At nine o'clock a servant went by, leading his employer's horse to pasture.

"Well, Master Hippolyte! I see you're off."

"The poor beast!" said Hippolyte. "He has need of a rest. . . . They had him out on the road yesterday; a whole carriageful of people."

"But what do you expect since he belongs to them?" answered the old man.

When he returned, Hippolyte dropped down upon the bench, drew close to Father Perdrix, slapped him on the thigh, and whispered:

"I met a fellow yesterday who was very drunk. He said to me: 'They'll eat him when he's too old, your fine people.' I told him:

'They'll always have something to put in their mouths, while you will never be anything but a famished wretch.' "

His days were spent upon his bench against the wall. Sometimes he was thoughtful, bending over, thrusting out his legs, and staring at the ground between his sabots.

Movements of the air, stirrings in the street, the colour of the hours and the striking of clocks, changes of the seasons, all that we can see, all that happens, things not even events, became of importance in his unoccupied mind. On warm days he lingered over the simplest thoughts: "Lord, the flies have never been as bad as they are to-day."

If someone came to sit down at his side, he fell upon him, not saying much because he did not know what to say, but rejoicing in the presence of a companion, as in an adventure. And instantly, when the other wished to leave, he would cry: "Oh, you have plenty of time!"

At noon he rose noisily to go in to dinner, but with the chagrin of a man of the people for whom eating is the sole pleasure, and to whom bread, potatoes, and water recall that there is nothing to hope for before the grave.

A certain occurrence greatly impressed Per-

drix. Father Lomet was an old sabot-maker, thin, brusque, and active, who at the age of sixty-five, after having hewn, carved, and hollowed wooden shoes, contracted severe pain in his limbs. Rheumatism seized upon his joints and opposed his movements like wild animals that watch you.

"Rest, walk, and breathe deeply," the doctor ordered.

He often came to see old Perdrix, appeared with his large crooked cane, made five or six efforts to sit down, and complained bitterly:

"Ah, Perdrix, it doubles me up!"

"Lomet, we are old men. We'll not be happy until we're in the grave."

It was a conversation they both enjoyed. "I cannot beg," said Lomet. "I must make an end of it." He watched the children playing near the bench and when they sometimes cried, he would exclaim: "How silly the little ones are. They have only to open their mouths and bread will be dropped into them. I, if I were in their place, would not whimper." Finally he could endure no more. His wife could no longer work, and he would not be supported by his son-in-law. One fine morning he rose at four o'clock and said to his wife: "I cannot sleep. I am going out for a while. Good-bye."

In the town was a drinking-pond for horses, and with much difficulty he walked to this water-hole. Blouf! . . . He made no struggle—he was a proud man.

Perdrix remained upon his bench and understood the meaning of it all. When a gentleman passed, he felt it beforehand from the lighter step, the step accustomed to waxed floors. He watched for a glance as one watches for a look from a king, rounded out his greeting, raised his hat with a declamatory gesture. He understood laziness and cowardice, and during the interment he thought: "I, too, should be buried."

At times his neighbours asked of him some service. There was, for example, the son of Mathiaud. His father was a fine man but always ill, and his mother had allowed him to acquire many bad habits. He would glance at one with shifting and wicked eyes and throw himself prone upon the floor. Alone with his mother, he was quarrelsome and would strike her. When convulsions seized him the neighbours said: "He is such a demon, it is evil coming out of his body." His mother, running into the street, would call: "Help, Father Perdrix!" and he always understood.

The lad, with foam on his lips, writhing,

would roll about, striking the furniture with his head as with a paving-stone. He would have killed himself, but that Perdrix would seize him by the body, shouting:

"Oh, you devil, I'll hold you now!"

Mother Mathiaud was grateful.

"Father Perdrix, there is no one but you from whom I can ask this service."

And Mathiaud's lad, exhausted, would sit down at last, utterly worn, with a strange look as though his gaze were turned inward.

Old Perdrix lived in the lowest sphere of the poor, where the dust of rubbish thickened on his brow. There were favours that could be asked only of him. His hat pulled down to his ears, his faded smock, and his heavy sabots foredoomed him to anything, like an old rag abandoned to scrubbing.

In many houses, cesspools had not been dug, and the toilet consisted of a plank and a tub with two handles. When this was to be emptied, it was brought out of the courtyard, through the house, placed upon a wheelbarrow, and rolled away somewhere outside the town to a kitchen garden. It was heavy and the woman could not take the other handle without injury to herself. They went in search of a man, and who should it

be but Father Perdrix? He was very strong, and bore the greater part of the burden, and in return they offered him a glass of wine. He accepted, but with the hesitancy of the poor, who are afraid of being thought greedy.

However, he did real work. There were many, young and old, who snatched at jobs like crumbs, dug with the pickax, shovelled with the spade, and wore down their sabots all day long for twenty-five sous. They did a day's work for payment in kind. Formerly, when the world was less evil, men agreed together to let each other live; thirty sous were earned with which they increased their bit of bread, and had their hands as full as a hungry child. But underbidders, with the stupidity of beggars, took advantage of the others, forestalled their plans, and offering themselves for twenty-five sous, sought to get all the work and ruin the journeymen. Yet they did not profit by it: everyone had to follow in their path, salaries were lowered since a little is better than nothing, and the trade of journeymen became a trade of twenty-five sous a day.

As Perdrix went out in the morning, the cobble-stones of the street resounded from the

clatter of his heavy sabots. He stumbled incessantly, and walked with long, slow, echoing steps, like the poor who work noisily and disturb the rich. He went a distance of four kilometres, even farther, to the very outskirts of the communes, on the neighbouring roads, where the day-labourers dug and spaded the yellow earth of fields across which roads were being built. In his knapsack he carried cheese and bread, apples or nuts, according to the season, and knew the misery of beggars who reflect: "In God's name, if only I had a little meat! Flesh nourishes flesh."

On the work was a large force of men, young and old, in shabby cotton jackets that cost thirty sous—men distorted by poverty, bearded, dull, fed on soup and clothed in patches. In short, nothing mattered to them—little did they care as they laboured for their twenty-five sous. Nor did the road-man of the commune, who superintended them, care. He chatted with them and being sixty years old, dreamed until evening about his wife of thirty, killing time, and waiting for her arms. With one foot upon their spades, and leaning on the handles, the labourers jested among themselves: "And a fine woman she is.

But God! she leaves him nothing but the skin on his bones. Ha ha ha ha ha!" At noon they lighted a fire of dead wood, seated themselves around it, and ate their lunch. They knew all the springs in the fields, fetched water in a pitcher that went the rounds, and there was always someone to say: "All the same, I like the red better than the white."

In the evening they left their work, and scattered over the roads in groups, pickax or shovel over their shoulders. The sound of heavy sabots mingled with the calling of the herds in the fields, with the light of the first stars, and later pierced that dense night which seems to enclose little towns as in a box. Half dead, with weary limbs, and steps resounding against the stones far more than in the morning, they were worn with misery, annihilated—for twenty-five sous. Perdrix could no longer think. It was not that rest was good, but that work was unbearable. He dreamed of all the days of his idleness upon his bench, of the afternoons that pass before the eyes of men who do not work, and slip away softly, like a benediction upon their wearied senses. Three or four little joys awaited him at his threshold: he stumbled against the steps, entered with a noise as of breaking tools,

dropped into his chair, drank his soup, fell upon his bed, turned his face toward the wall, and sunk into the depths of sleep as a ball rolls down a slope.

Chapter Four

At last the long anticipated event was realized. The three children, Jacques, François, and Marie, had said among themselves: "One fine day we will all go together to see the old man." They had made the arrangements and written to him. Marie was to arrive by the post with Jules Passat, her husband, and was not to bring her two daughters, because the old man knew them already, and the trip would have cost too much. François planned to come with his wife, Jacques with his, and as the latter was a mechanic, the railroad

journey would not cost him anything, and he could have with him his two children.

Old Perdrix prepared for the day: "It is the two little ones that I want most to see, and to know whom they resemble." His old wife, gathering her cress, also gathered her thoughts: "Mercy, I wish they had already come."

On the appointed day, about four o'clock in the morning, a storm arose and thunder and rain mingled and resounded. Doubtless they had taken a covered carriage, but how frightened the children must be! By six o'clock, however, all was calm; it was now a moist September morning; the street was washed, the sky a little veiled, and freshness floated so delicately in the air that one might have said that hearts also were purified.

Jacques and François arrived at seven o'clock. The carriage was full—a carriage full of Perdrixes, that had come so suddenly, one could not believe the thing was true. François leaped to the ground and held the horse by the bridle, so that the women might descend. The two children leaned out and the old man took one in each arm. The boy was a dark little fellow, like his father, but the girl was blonde and of another type. Immediately they called him grandfather, stroked his beard, and loved his dark glasses.

Before everyone had gone in, he seated himself and had them quickly on his knees.

"Truly, father, if you let them, they'll soon wear you out."

He put them down, and everyone embraced. The boys kissed him, as men kiss one another, with a sort of fervour. He seized the daughters-in-law with his hand under their chin, his fingers on their cheeks, and kissed them loudly. And when he had finished, he exclaimed: "Oh, my two dear little daughters, come, let me embrace you again!"

Everyone sat down and the old man said, as in former days, when he earned his living:

"To be sure, we are not here to waste our time. What if we have a drink while we are waiting for the others?"

His wife brought glasses and a bottle, while he continued: "Do you know, Jacques, Déry the shoemaker said: 'It can't be true that he is a railroad mechanic. The mechanics are men who come from the technical schools.' "

And Jacques answered: "Let him alone, father. You know there are jealous men everywhere."

Pierre and Marie arrived at eight o'clock.

Suddenly they opened the door and were in the midst of the clan.

"Why haven't you brought the two children? It is not too often that we have a reunion."

A round of embraces followed and the children were a little frightened. Mother Perdrix brought two glasses for Pierre and Marie, saying: "Now we must drink a toast."

On the evening before, the old man had killed a rabbit. He had cared for and counted them, watched them grow, and thought: "I have a mother rabbit that must weigh at least six pounds. She will be just the one for us." His wife had bought a pork roast, and if that should not be sufficient, an omelette could always be made. There were three bottles of wine in the cupboard and, besides, the inn was but a door away. The odour of the stew arose and the crackling of the fat seemed the first ebullition of a promise.

"Listen, wife," said Father Perdrix, "they are all going down to bid good morning to their cousin Bousset, and since there is enough, will bring little Jean back to eat with us."

Jean Bousset was twenty-one years old and had graduated from the École Centrale eighth in his

class. He worked like a good little girl who is told: "Now that you are a big girl, you must busy yourself. You are going to make lace." His blue eyes had a gentle expression, which formerly would have been called timid and veiled, but which shone with more force now that he was fortified by a diploma, while the blond lock of hair on his brow lent individuality to his face. He returned with the others.

"Ah, little Jean, I am glad that you came, and I tell you it will not cost much. Come here, naughty boy!"

Then the old man kissed him with his soft, unaccustomed lips.

When they were seated at table, glory shone around. The old man was hungry from want, the children were hungry from travelling, and the mother, as a former cook, enjoyed the rare sense of abundance. The rabbit on the plates, the wine in the glasses, the bread on the table, only whetted their appetites for the other food and drink they knew would follow. Their thoughts centred about the roast, with its complement of bread and cheese, after which they flitted to the coffee and to the brandy, and on to the leisure of the whole afternoon when the

glasses would be filled with wine. As on a voyage, the old man felt himself carried away, borne along, with all the forces of his life surging up and raising his heart above the feast.

The hours of the afternoon were yet to come, time was yet unborn, joy did not even stir, but hovered above the room like a calm, deep cloud. Each one ate with emotion, with only an occasional word.

"I said to myself: it's strange! They all came out of this room and now they are scattered to the four corners of the earth."

And again:

"I am a dull old man. When I think of it, it lays hold upon me, it stuns me. The children go away and then, it seems, are lost to me."

"But father," answered the daughters-in-law, "you know they have to go away. Each one must live his own life."

The white meat of the rabbit was very slight fare, and they felt within them only the weight of the bread and the warmth of the wine accompanying it. But with the pork roast, real meat appeared. The fat was as good as the lean, and together, in each bite, gave the taste of nuts. A substantial meat, it satisfied their bodies, warm-

ing their hearts with its richness and giving them a sense, upon leaving the table, of strength absorbed, of flesh added to their own.

Outside the window the bench which could be seen in the shadow against the opposite wall, upheld its plank, spread out its rough feet, and remained there for other days, with the reassuring silence of a familiar presence.

"Look!" said the old man. "There is my companion. It's no longer merely a bench, it is a brother. From here you can see where I sit. It is a hard bench, and when I walk I can still feel its pressure, and sometimes it seems to me I am carrying it about on my pantaloons."

Long since, the three bottles of wine had been drained. There had been three others, and the diners, because of their great thirst, had followed these with further groups of three. It was one of those pale wines that the peasants do not like, and whose warmth is slow. Even the third bottle seemed a mockery, a bitter drink made of water and raisins. But the fourth bottle was felt in the cheek-bones, in the hands, the eyes, and things began to grow brighter. At the fifth, the inn of the "Pickled Pork," "twelve sous a bottle," and "the warmth of the vine" aroused generous ideas. The old man grew splendidly

garrulous, richer with every glass, as a landowner is enriched by a vineyard, by a field, and he ordered his wife to make the omelette.

"No, father, no. We have had enough."

"My God, you torment me! You are here to eat."

It was beautiful, it was such a day as occurs in the life of the rich. Their stomachs were full, their thoughts shone, and their hearts overflowed. There were sudden illuminations clarifying some habit of the present, some memory of the past, and foreshowing the future as an open glade. It was a fine repast. The omelette was eaten without hunger, and filled in the last crevices where a pleasure could be stowed away. The wine washed it down, and spread over it, like happiness upon a brow, like a lake in the midst of green pastures. Life was good and mankind was good. They felt kindly toward everyone, and possessed all grandeur and power. They were the human family, with its interchanging glances and varied fellowship. It was not true that they were poor.

"Come now, Jean, tell them what a fine place you have found."

Yes, little Jean Bousset had found a good place

and in his own district. He reached there after two hours by carriage and one hour by rail. It was in a factory of chemical products, where immediately, despite his youth, he had been given the position of engineer. But after all, what he did was of small importance; the essential fact was that he would earn four thousand francs a year. The director himself had asked for him, because he wished to surround himself with very young men, who were disciplined and absorbed in their profession.

"Well, my boys, what do you think of that?" asked the old man.

Jean Bousset was not proud, but naturally aware of his worth, and spoke as one who knows whereof he speaks.

"And above all, Jean," said François, "be kind to the workman. Consider that he must earn his living and that sometimes he has to take a drink."

Jean replied:

"Faith, I'll not be a bad fellow, provided that he is polite . . . and works."

At the sixth bottle, there was not enough wine. Hearts expanded, throats accepted, and hands were warm. From the table widening waves floated to the guests, murmured in their ears, and united them one to another in a bond of love,

in a bond of alcohol. Two more bottles were needed, and then no one knew what was not needed. Mother Perdrix brought the cheese.

"Take that away!" cried the old man. "I see enough of it during the whole year. In heaven's name, at least let me eat what I please to-day. Go and get us a box of biscuits."

Everyone thought this unnecessary.

"Go on, go on, I tell you—!"

They dipped the biscuits in the wine while they talked, stirred them about, and when, on raising them to their lips, the whole cracker fell into the glass, they remained with their mouths open like waiting sparrows.

"These biscuits are no good," said the old man.

Then they drank the dregs of the wine that remained, grew tired of that, and threw it into the ashes on the hearth, replacing it with wine that ran freely and rinsed the flagstones.

But the time for the coffee was the best. Coffee is coffee, but above all it is the completion of the repast, when everything is over and whatever is then added is a surplus pleasure. Hot coffee, a good draught, a perfume, a last satisfaction which lingers and awakens all the sensations of well-being. One feels a sense of happiness, and no longer takes the trouble to live,

because something within us lives and speaks.

"Oh! You do not know my pipe!" said the father. "I have a pipe and you must see if it isn't true that it is beginning to be coloured. Here it is. Heh! . . ."

It was a cheap clay pipe with a long stem, and the interior of the bowl was slightly darkened. It went the rounds, the men smelled it, and undoubtedly it had the wine-tint of a coloured pipe. Indicating Jean Bousset, the old man exclaimed:

"There's the one who gave it to me. Let me tell you there's not another like him! He comes and sits on my bench. 'Uncle, give me a pinch.' And I say: 'Now, you, fill my pipe.' And so we sit there, side by side. And I tell you he knows how to talk! I am only an old fool, but just the same, it pleases me. He will say: 'You know my parents made many sacrifices for me. Now I am to earn four thousand francs, but before now how much I have cost them!' Ah, poor child!"

The brandy came from Father Rondet's. It was thirty-eight sous a bottle and had a delicious aroma. Everyone in the town knew that Father Rondet, the grocer, had good coffee and good brandy: he had bought from the same firm for

more than thirty years, and it supplied to him finer stuff than to others. They felt it in their throats and it burned again on the palate. Great puffs rose from the pipe—pouf! pouf!—irritated their chests, and made them spit, so that the brandy seemed a cordial that went straight to the heart.

"My children," said the old man, "we still have ample time to spend together. You say you must leave about seven o'clock. We must have another bite to eat."

"Do you know, Jacques," he continued, "when I realize that you are an engine-driver and are earning your living, I say to myself: 'After all, he is a fine fellow.' You had your faults as everyone has, but you did not drink. When Dr. Edmond Lartigaud lent a helping hand to get you on the railroad, I did not think of that trade. But now, my boy, I am afraid. Sometimes, among those people, it seems there are strikes. Do not listen to them. There are far too many who are waiting for the places, and it is these who set the others on to strike, in order to walk over them.

"And you, François, are not a bad fellow. Only you love to drink. I do not say that is a fault—it depends on one's means. What do

you want? You ought to be able to secure a position like your brother's instead of working for other men. Poor fellow, I remember how I put you out of the house. It was, of course, somewhat your fault, for you had not been sober for a week. But, all the same, I should not have done it. I shouted: 'Get out of here. I'm ashamed of you.' You said nothing, for the wine did not affect your temper. You went away, and did not write to me for a year. I thought: 'My God! if I only knew that nothing had happened to him!' I had told the police about the matter, and when you wrote to me—do you know, it was little Jean Bousset who read me your letter. I cried over it, and your poor mother said: 'Thank God!' Ah, François, whatever you might do, I would love you as much as the others!"

To Marie he said:

"As for you, my daughter, I am glad that you have found such a husband; I love him as one of my own sons. Yes, there are times when I think only of him. Recently, when his arm was broken, I said to myself: 'It would have been far better if this accident had happened to you. Here you are, wearing out your bench, and whether you have one arm the more or less, it is

all the same—you are only a good-for-nothing.' "

And oh, the brandy! the brandy! It shone with a yellow hue in the thick glass, with a boiling warmth found only in brandy. It slipped into his mouth, descended, and enveloped his heart. The first drops are not so good; presently, however, it transfuses and penetrates even into your arms. The conquest of the world is easy: you take it to your bosom, you embrace it, it loves you. Then this blessing of good digestion, this flame, this fire upon fire! Let us go to the Pole, even to the skies. Let us pass beyond all reality.

"Ah, my children, you doubtless think me more unhappy than I am. At first I dreaded poverty, and truly it is hard in the beginning. But I have all of you, and that is enough. You are here, you may say that I am foolish or am drunk, but it seems to me that I carry you still on my heart, and feel you about me as though you were not yet born."

"Ah, father, you pay us pretty compliments!" replied the daughters-in-law.

The afternoon wore on, with bottle and glass. The shadowy atmosphere of the room surrounded the table, but neither atmosphere nor table existed, for the hearts were warmed with

brandy. Its beautiful aroma, stronger than love, rose above thoughts and words, mounting and dominating the world like an angel with wings outspread. From the depths of their consciousness they felt it arise; its spirit was Jacques, François, and Marie, then the children, then Jules Passat, and Jean Bousset; it was happiness, it was a long repast lasting throughout life and ever sustaining it. Sometimes it sparkled like a fuse, flung you forward, and set you dancing. If the world is beautiful, if hearts tremble, if songs exist, brandy of one evening, blessed be thou!

And the hours passed, paused an instant, elbows on the table, then in their satiety rolled away like sluggish blood, until seven o'clock had come. With the arrival of this hour, there was a shudder, for it loomed up and threatened the company with its eyes. Ah! alcohol was nothing; everybody was agitated and burdened with one nervous hour. They dared not make a gesture for fear of disturbing it, for it seemed that it would have responded to the movement of a finger!

"You mustn't go, you mustn't go . . ." said the old man, and when he rose, he could not stand, but collapsed on his chair, and felt his

thoughts turning round and round like a repeating machine:

"You mustn't go, you mustn't go . . ."

They all rose.

"Oh, Marie, you stay at least, my daughter. It is you I love the best. If you could only stay."

Seven o'clock struck. Hands clutched like hooks.

"You, my dear, we have always cared for you. Only Jules must go. Stay here for a week. Take us and keep us. You know that I have never hurt you."

She stood, wavering like a block about to fall. Then Jules spoke:

"Stay, by all means. I will arrange for the children. He is your father."

The strokes of seven o'clock were exhaled like a comforting sigh. The sound was good and fraught with meaning.

Then came the departure: the harnessed horse, the carriage-wheels, and the air that is stirred and passes away.

"We came here to see him," said the daughters-in-law, "and then he did not know what he was saying and stirred up unpleasantness."

Chapter Five

The poor belong to the public.

Marie remained for a week, and put on airs with her big arms, saying: "Don't be afraid of anything father; if you are in need . . ." She could be heard in the neighbouring houses. She was happy to speak as though she were on the public square, and raised her voice in order to give her words at least the truth that arises from great noise. She was also seen, her sleeves rolled up, a corner of her apron raised, half Sunday, half workaday, passing about in the house, shaking a soup pot, giving

a flip of the broom, stopping the passers-by: "Oh! Yes, indeed, Jules is a good workman."

She carried her troubles, her chatter, and her work to everyone, and upset the world around her like an unexpected event. Mother Perdrix would go out to make a purchase, with a bottle in the pocket of her skirt, slip into the back door, the wine merchants having no right to sell retail, and then return home, thinking of her husband who loved his drink. She killed rabbits, went to the butcher's, bought fruit at the market, and for a week she cooked, the strings of her bonnet down her back, and made trips to the grocer for salt, pepper, coffee, and butter.

The townspeople all about were nursing their hidden thoughts, like fires that burned in the depths of their beings, rising within them as in beasts, and, above all, the women who sewed and raised their eyes, seized upon the gossip. Little towns are reservoirs of scandal, and people who live in a rut often deal out great injustice. It began by idle talk. "Oh, Mother Perdrix takes many trips!"—"They are making her use her legs."—"She has two good-for-nothings to feed."—"Ah, indeed, this big woman doesn't deserve soup."

Pricking up their ears, they gathered closer to-

gether, completed each other's stories, and one by one threw their words upon the heap. The well-to-do workmen declared: "They dine better than we," and their wives added: "They are like all beggars; they have nothing to lose." In the home of Regrain the sabot-maker and Déry the shoemaker, they ate soup, with meat only a memory, and when someone said: "Well, after all it's not your money," Déry the shoemaker sprang up to reply: "How isn't it our money? Who furnishes the funds for the Charity Bureau?" The gentlemen of the Senate, to whom the question was submitted, discoursed wisely upon the matter:

"Of course we cannot blame them for loving their children, and I grant them the first day's reunion. However, if the municipality furnishes assistance to the needy, we are forced to believe that it should feed Perdrix and his wife, who are of this commune, but not their daughter, who is from I don't know where. Giving wood, bread and meat to her is a theft practised upon the poor of this district."

Once Marie-Louise fell in with the crowd. Because of the white wine, her fingers danced, shaking even her forearms, and because of her wealth, she had taken on certain habits of the

upper classes, such as addressing all the women as "Madame."

"Here is a boy who has had poverty snatched off his back. Yes, Madame, I am speaking of Jacques Perdrix. It was through Dr. Edmund that he was employed on the railroad. The prefect had said to him: 'You must know you need not stand on ceremony when you have someone you wish to place.'

"Dr. Edmond wrote—I do not know what you call them—to the engineer. . . . Well, Madame, they all came to visit the old man and Jacques did not deign to come to see us.

" 'I want you to know, my dear,' I said to Dr. Edmond, 'if ever you take an interest in anyone again, it's with me that you must deal.' "

"Indeed, you did right, Madame!"

"And as for this big daughter, Dr. Edmond gives fifty francs a year to the Charity Bureau. Well, Madame, it is fifty francs that she costs us.

"And then this Jacques," she added; "perhaps he doesn't earn as much as they say. He is only a workman."

And when she had gone, they said:

"She is drunk, but she's right, just the same."

Many spoken words accompanied big Marie

upon her comings and goings, and curtains were raised behind her, so that the view of her from the houses might not be obstructed. She was accosted from some open door:

"Well, Madame Marie?"

"Yes, Madame, I am staying with these two old people. You understand that at their age I need to help them."

"Oh, certainly, the young should help the old."

And three thousand men counted their charities on their fingers and experienced, in seeing her, a curious pleasure, in which the joy of an event mingled with the thought of tax sheets where the additional centimes were going to increase.

But it was Dr. Edmond who gave the final word, for the gentry know what to do. Dr. Edmond Lartigaud had again been seized with gout. During the past few months, however, he had taken care of himself, absorbing salicylate and eating only white meats. But finally he had given this up, because depriving himself of everything was really another malady. He was attacked in the ankle and wrist and had to keep his left leg extended all day, his foot resting upon a stool, while pain ruled and dominated the world.

But this time, when the gout had passed, he was not cured. He could not walk, his stomach had grown larger, and in dragging himself about, he had to have a cane, like a pot with three feet. Then from having to remain seated, he grew heavier still, and as his thighs increased and took on padding, he felt them heavy and fixed, like the columns of a temple. His loins also thickened like an elephant's, and his rounded back, which, however, did not bend, seemed a burden that might have been fastened upon him.

He lived in his arm-chair, in the dining-room. The windows looked out upon the street, and with the table in front of him, he felt thoroughly at his ease. It cannot be said that this was so great a change, for, at fifty-two, that age has come towards which one has walked, hunted, and ridden all one's life. Besides, if he no longer had legs, he at least had his stomach, and his wealth allowed him to load his table, and to think during each meal that the world had no limits other than those of his appetite.

Dr. Edmond did not like to read, because in books one writes whatever one wishes, and because reading made him sleepy. He had read novels in his youth, and kept a memory of them mixed with the books of the Latin Quarter and

the rather foolish ideas of young men. However, he knew one or two of Émile Zola's novels, and when the hero used the most obscure language, Dr. Edmond would say: "How true that is!"

He had the same opinions held by all the gentry of the country, where open air, or, as they say, free nature, fills the head, and where good food rises from the stomach to the brain like matter mingled with their thoughts.

Nevertheless, he was not entirely happy. A stomach—that is good, but when it is full, when it is too full, and when one sits with an empty head in a chair by the table, does it not seem that something is lacking, and does one not reflect that happiness is the state of him to whom nothing can be lacking? Dr. Edmond gazed out through the window at the street and shut himself up like the street, between the rows of houses. Like the window-panes, he reflected the passers-by and the cobble-stones, and his thoughts followed anything, provided only that they were stirred a little.

One day this story of Perdrix fell out of the sky. It seemed to Dr. Edmond that an injustice had been committed and that someone among the powers that be, in defying him, had offended the

law. He suffered a particular hurt to his vanity and his habits, as though his veins were loaded with splinters of bone; as though straw were adulterating his basis of gold. In such a gross nature, where a blood clot threatens apoplexy, everything centres with congestion at the back of the neck. Jacques Perdrix had not paid his visit to Dr. Edmond, and Dr. Edmond possessed, to the depths of his soul, a sense of justice.

The mayor was a merry carpenter, red and round, who employed three workmen and looked at men and things with the eyes of a master who governs and understands them. His black beard gave to his face just that touch which is added by a beard into which a man seems to retire and enjoy his thoughts. An employer and the son of an employer, life had given him the assurance of those who have only to continue their forward march and who go their way with all the advantages afforded by prosperity. One day a man was explaining something to him and finished by saying:

"Do you understand?"

"I—yes! yes!" the carpenter answered. "I understand everything."

That is why Lamoureux was elected mayor, and his situation, raising him above his class by

the circumstances that bring a mayor into contact with the principal men under him, gave him the manner and speech of a man of wide knowledge.

One afternoon he was passing Dr. Edmond's window, when Marie-Louise, seeing him, said to her husband:

"You were wishing to speak to Lamoureux," and at the same time opened the window.

"Wait, Lamoureux! Listen to me for a moment."

Dr. Edmond rose while his chair was drawn closer to the window, supported himself upon his cane, dragging three hundred pounds for three steps, sat down, and faced Lamoureux, standing in the street. The conversation was brief, as is the way with the gentry, whose wealth is of such importance that it limits their words.

"Well, Lamoureux, that it should be I who tell you, I, a helpless man, who watches over the affairs of the commune! Here is a father with three children, who receives visits from them and who procures at our expense the pleasure of his daughter's company, so that a week passes and one asks oneself if months will not yet pass, during which, not content with feeding our poor, we must also feed the guests of poverty. Ah!

The thing is simple! Lamoureux, beggars increase like a snowball. I look at another side of the question. Our means are limited, remember, and we should stop giving them where other help begins. I know, having secured the place for him, that Jacques Perdrix is on the railroad; now if François Perdrix saves a little of the money he is accustomed to spend on drinking, and joins with his brother-in-law, one father having fed three children, three children could feed one father. Isn't this true, Lamoureux? If they come to see him, it is because they are friendly with him; if you are friendly with him, give him a pension."

"Yet," replied Lamoureux, "if he is sick . . ." Lartigaud raised his right hand and held it open, seeming to bear an answer in the palm.

"I understand that, Lamoureux. Am I a doctor?"

"Certainly you are."

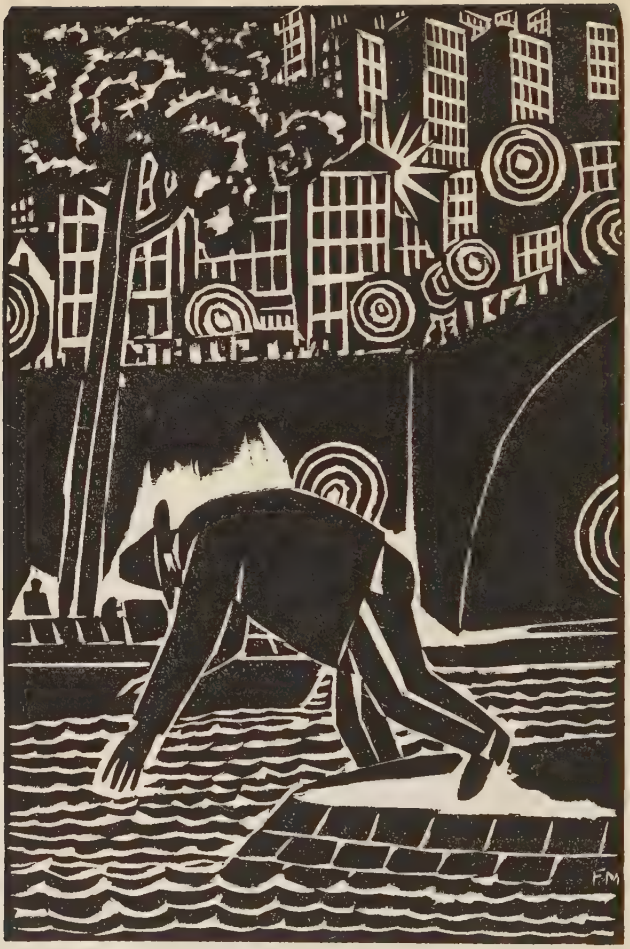
"Good! Am I a doctor? Then I tell you that formerly, perhaps . . . and yet, do I know if he had anything wrong with his sight? Very well, you attend to your affairs and I'll attend to mine. He can walk, therefore he can work."

That was all.

"Hum!" said Lamoureux.

In short, two weeks later, upon a motion of the mayor, Father Perdrix was struck from the rolls of the Charity Bureau.

Part Two



Chapter One

It was in the following year, upon a summer day, when the world was radiant and life had ripened in the fields, like wheat, like bread, like a body brimming with good health; it was upon a day on which men might say to themselves: "It is finished, our future is assured, we have only to take our ease and let our souls become one with the seasons."

Pierre Bousset was working in his shop, his two employés near by. One certainly could not congratulate them upon their activity; but as they were paid by the piece, existence with them

was endurable, so long as there were no especially hurried orders. Suddenly Limousin raised his head, exclaiming:

"Ah! there he is!"

Pierre Bousset looked. Good God, it was Jean! He had a strange look, a double look as when one has done something and does not yet know it. Together Pierre and Jean went into the room, where Mother Bousset was dusting the furniture with that daily minuteness which suggests an examination of one's conscience. Marguerite, seated at the window, had been sewing since morning. Their hearts quickened; it is not good news that comes unexpectedly.

Pierre Bousset began:

"How does it happen that you came to-day?"

Jean sat down rather slowly, and it seemed as if something else also sat down in the house.

"I warrant you haven't eaten," his mother said. "I am going to make some chocolate while we wait for lunch."

Jean blurted out everything:

"Well, this is the reason. There is news. I'll have to tell you—I've left my place!"

"What! You have left your place?"

All three stiffened; Pierre Bousset with his apron and work-bowed shoulders; and Jean

noticed that his hair was grey. His mother held a saucepan in her hand, the cook in her taking care, but feeling as if the saucepan would fall. Marguerite began to cry:

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! And I was so proud of you!"

"And why have you done this fine thing?" said Pierre Bousset.

It was then that Jean felt his soul flinch; and from the depths of his heart a great need of love arose within him. It was essential that they draw together and understand each other and that someone should begin to weaken. He spoke:

"Do we know what we do?"

"Ah, indeed," said his father. "So you do not know what you are doing!"

"There are times," answered Jean, "when a man loses his head, and I do not deny that he may regret it afterwards."

"As for losing your head, I only know one thing—that is, that you are paid, and it's your business always to obey your employer."

His mother watched the chocolate, the steam from which now rose with a strength-giving warmth. The family loved it as a Sunday morning treat; it was a luxury of the better

classes, for whom Sunday is often a kind of holiday.

"Never mind," she said. "Whatever happens, he must eat all the same."

Jean began to talk. His blue eyes had undergone that transformation which maturity brings about, when one is no longer Jean, son of Pierre, student at the École Centrale, but Jean Bousset, engineer of a chemical factory. They still glowed, however, like the bright eyes of a little girl, as shining as two rays of sunlight mirrored in a spring. And now they held supplication like the touching sweetness of a naked child.

"Oh, I know what you will say. You cannot side with me, because you were not in my place; and I cannot condemn the promptings of my heart. You know, for I wrote you, that the workmen wished to go on strike. At once I thought that these were things which did not concern me, because one who is working for himself must not look farther. But François Perdrix explained everything to me."

"That's what I told you!" cried Pierre Bousset. "When you wished to secure a place in your factory for François Perdrix, I said to you, 'Always hold your kin at a distance. They impose upon you, and often in order to shield them, you are

forced to commit a whole series of base actions.' "

"However," said Jean, "I have never had cause to complain of him. On the contrary, he is very generous-hearted."

"Oh, all drunkards are like that! You say, 'They are generous-hearted,' and do not count the times they lead others astray."

"Ah, I've come to understand many things, father! How shall I explain all the things I have learned? There are times when seeing and understanding create a confusion in my mind, as if the world were upside-down. I repeat, it is François Perdrix who made me understand. I used to see him in the evenings, and I would say to him: 'I am bored. I haven't even a companion, and at the hotel tables I eat dinners too well served.' He answered: 'Come to see me; you do not know what it is to eat good things because you do not work, and hunger is a part of work. Eat soup with us and we'll tell you at least that you are happy to be where you are, watching others labour while you pretend to work.' I'd say to him: 'But I work, too! Seeing, understanding, analysing, being an engineer! You labour with your arms, I with my head and heart.' He broke into a roar of laughter. 'When I come home in the evening, with my

throat dry, and eat soup, my head aches, and I don't care a damn if your heart aches. I'm dog-tired. What difference does your heart make?' "

"Yes, he's right in that," declared Pierre Bousset. "But I don't know what you are getting at. Ah? You have come to understand many things! As for me, I understand but one thing, and that is, you are unhappy from being too well off."

And Jean talked, with his lovely blue eyes, pretty as a ribbon, a foolish pompon with which a young girl decks her brow. And from his heart exhaled a sweetness which floated forth into the room where the waxed furniture gave back angular reflections.

Marguerite listened, stirring restlessly, listened to her father, as a child accustomed to the guidance of her parents. Her mother tended the chocolate, choked with emotion, shaking her head, and adding her word:

"Yes, yes, he was never like others. You remember when they wanted to dismiss him from the school, he would have been only too satisfied to stay here and do nothing."

These words pierced Jean to the heart, and from time to time he shivered, but a great calm, that deep peace which is born of noble thoughts,

soon wrapped him round with supreme love, like a guardian angel watching by a cradle.

"Yesterday I was in the director's office when the delegation arrived. I seem to see it all again. There were three workmen; they had put on white shirts and had just washed their hands. You know how the poor approach the rich. There was a large rug on which they walked with such embarrassment that you felt in the hearts of the three men the shame of something crushed. I had already been thinking of poverty which, knowing that it soils, shrinks and dares not even touch an object. They spoke to the director:

" 'We have been sent to talk with you, sir. For more than ten years we have been in the factory, and we earn three francs ten sous a day. We only say this because we have wives and children, and our three francs ten sous scarcely go farther than a glass of wine and a plate of soup. Of course, you also have expenses, but we would like to earn four francs a day, and, in short, you must consent to this, because money puts spirit into the workman.'

"The director received them with that assurance of the rich, sitting erect in his arm-chair and holding his head with an air of dominance. With his education, his accustomed position as

master, his strength as employer, he had little trouble in confusing all three.

" 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'from now on I must say no to you. The firm cannot take your wishes into account. We pay you three francs fifty and consider it is for you to make your mode of living fit your salary. As for your insinuations, I shall employ whatever means I please to strengthen your morale. For the rest, our profits are not what you imagine, you who know neither our efforts nor our losses.'

"It was then, father, that I felt myself your son, and remembered your hands and back that laboured, and the carriage wheels. The three workmen seemed three children in their father's house, with swelling hearts that no longer felt. Ah, I had thought to be an engineer. I had imagined on the school benches that my head was full of science and that that sufficed. But all my father's blood, the days I have passed in your shop, and these emotions that rise to your brain and seem to come from far, all this cried aloud in me. I put in a word to the director:

" 'Sir, I know them. My cousin works in the factory. Do you know what it means, this life of acids and coal?'

"If you could have seen him! He looked at

me with eyes whose pupils seemed turned to ice.

" 'Mr. Engineer, I will not permit to you, who are a child, nor to these, who are workmen, a single word of discussion concerning my speech and actions. Gentlemen, you may go.'

"I became a dog, a free dog. A door opened at a single burst. We have at least insolence, we poor people, and the power to bark, since their weapons prevent our biting. I went out with the others. They bent their heads and thought; I shouted. I turned back and shouted:

" 'May you be damned!' "

"Ah, indeed! I certainly did not expect that," wailed Pierre Bousset. "We raise children to make gentlemen of them, so that they may work a little less than we. Now, in God's name, go ask a position from those men for whom you lost yours!"

Formerly the universe seemed real and solid, and one had only to reach out one's hands to touch its farthest edges. One thought: "Yet a few years, a few years, for further effort, after which we can rest." If then the world could only congeal, if our feelings also could congeal in our hearts, and our life's boundaries be fixed in certain definite shape—then we could know that we are happy.

"This is the way of it," Pierre Bousset said to his wife. "You remember Madame Lartigaud's words one day when she was drunk: 'You educate your children and then they spit in your face.' "

However, the chocolate was ready and the mother brought it in a cup, with toasted bread.

"Come now, drink this. If you haven't enough bread, I will toast more."

Jean ate, being only twenty-two, and hungry from his morning's journey by train and carriage, and from the fresh air. He had known chocolate on fine Sundays in his childhood: with it now he seemed to be drinking in the clear sound of bells, the white cloths, communion at the altar, and his twelve years passed in study. There are good foods which have their source in the long ago, and heal sick hearts.

"I don't know how he can eat," complained his father. "As for me, every mouthful would stick in my throat."

Thereafter they talked but little. Pierre Bousset sat with his large hands resting upon his knees, in a surprised, unbalanced attitude, like a thought that hurts and cannot last. The mother continued to polish the furniture, in the manner of an old machine, her steps like the clatter of

piston rods. Sometimes she clutched at a clothes-press, like a silly animal that wished to climb the walls. And little Marguerite still sewed, wholly overcome, a good little sister, weeping for her brother, with tears and emotions whose flow seemed to drain her heart dry.

It would seem that something evil had entered your head, and weighed upon your brow, upon the nape of your neck, and wished to destroy you or to penetrate into your very bones. Pierre Bousset sighed deeply to banish this oppression, to rid himself of it, in God's name! so that he might breathe more easily.

"It presses on my stomach," he said.

Then he fell back into silence, while sorrows crowded upon him, seeming to expand his very scalp. Even as he felt one wave surging upon him, he perceived yet another which howled like a dog and struggled endlessly in the confusion of lost hopes. However, he talked a little.

"They must have paid you before you came, and some money should be left. You must give it to us to take care of, for you will need it."

They had not even the resource of thinking him thrifty. Earning four thousand francs a year, and being only a boy, how could he have used it all? And they had to believe, after all, that he

was furtive and trifling, and to anticipate those acts of folly brought about by ignorance of the worth of life and scorn of the value of money. Now at the end of a year he brought you two hundred and fifty francs, not even the full wages for his last month, and you felt that he had lived from day to day with the indifference of those who have no ambition. It was sad, and the boy had been punished while others suffered the pain, and the future that opened before you seemed like something to which you could not grow accustomed. Moreover, he wished to keep fifty francs for himself, at the risk of losing them, and you did not know how—ah, truly you did not know how to understand him. There was only one thing to say:

"Yes, Jean, there is no satisfaction to be had in you."

At this moment they heard the heavy sabots of Father Perdrix. Since the preceding year he had taken on great weight, and bumped into everything along the street, for the poor are feeble and run against walls. He drew near and arrived, like a machine for dragging heavy sabots, sonorous and hollow, and opened the door. Being timid, like a poor relation, he explained his coming, and hastened to give an account of him-

self, since he was always afraid of causing disturbance.

"I saw Jean pass, it surprised me, and I said to myself: 'Something is wrong. I must go and see what has happened.' "

Then he embraced Jean in a rather effusive manner, exaggerating his affection, that it might be clearly seen. They told him all, and he said at once of François:

"As for that boy, I am angry with him. Not content with getting drunk, he must now invent a pack of lies."

And to Jean he said:

"Oh, my friend, you are a little fool. I myself am a wretched old man. Why mix yourself up in it? One must leave the wretched as they are."

Chapter Two

These were hard times for Father Perdrix. His hat, with its frayed brim, was still pulled down over his glasses, and his old forehead grew sunken at the temples and thin like a picture of famine. He sat upon his bench through successive summers; his knees served as a rest for his elbows, his head hung down, and his eyes stared at his feet. He would scratch the ground with the edge of his sabot, then smooth it down with little taps of the sole. He made grooves, large grooves like furrows, afterwards trying to fill them again, and this consumed minutes, quarter-hours, and finally afternoons.

The first slopes of poverty, as he stumbled down them, had bruised his body; now habit had healed and calloused him, and the wooden bench upon which he sat had taken on a friendly firmness, a solidity of something sure. Poverty is not a definitive state that smacks of unhappiness. At first one sits down and thinks of one's daily bread, then the days, bringing the bread to us, draw near to our hearts and reassure them like kindly friends.

The worst moment was when they dismissed him from the Charity Bureau, because he felt himself growing old and the weight of years made him tremble.

His life was as unsteady as a tool with a loose handle, and he could not touch it without feeling it useless and worn out. It had the sudden movements of an animal trying to escape, the unexpected tossings of the head of an old horse finally overcome by fatigue, which will drop dead a hundred yards from its manger: "My God," thought Perdrix, "I'll go jump in the river without warning anyone, and drown this scurvy I carry around before it gets into my very bones!" Then all this passed, and he sat again at ease upon his bench. Thought came back to him; to breathe—merely to breathe—was good, and to sit

watching the road and eat dry bread—this constituted life and set him once more in the midst of people among the pleasures of air and light, and the stir of the street which he loved to see.

But when Jean Bousset was there, he would waken in the morning, thinking, "Poor little fellow, he will come to sit on my bench," for they were good friends.

Jean would arrive on the stroke of nine, having had his breakfast.

"Ah, here you are, brother!"

He would draw aside and give him room, and they always kissed one another. Sometimes the good wives said:

"It's fine for a big fellow of his age to kiss you like that."

Then the day began. Often they both hung their heads down, and Jean would declare:

"It's not hot this morning."

And the old man would answer:

"Indeed not, but I believe we shall have fine weather, because it's a good sign when my leg doesn't hurt."

Jean traced much finer grooves upon the ground because of the sole of his shoe. Sometimes he drew triangles, scratching the three sides and having much difficulty in making them meet

at a common point. He tried to draw circles, but this was impossible because the foot does not turn.

About ten o'clock, Nénesse, the newspaper-seller, would pass. He had a large head and twisted limbs, and had been in the community so long that newspapers seemed made expressly to be sold by gnomes.

"Well, what's the news in your papers?" they would ask him.

"As if I had time to read them!" he answered, and they would think:

"Strange, he sells papers and does not even know what is in them."

Jean bought the *Petit Parisien* and the old man would say:

"Come brother, read me the news."

He loved to be read to, because it took his mind off himself, and enabled him to know things which everyone else did not know. He delighted in "events of the day" as in an old illustration, a picture on the margin of the book of life.

"You know that all men are alike," he would say of politics. "They only think of eating, and it is all a question of who can get most for himself."

On Thursday, when the supplement of the

Petit Parisien arrived, the old man would cry joyously, "Now we shall see the pictures!" And he would bend over them, trying to understand their meaning.

"What is this fellow doing?"

"Don't you see?" answered Jean. "He is raising his knife to kill her!"

"I'll tell you one thing," said the old man; "he's a scoundrel!" And he bent over again to see, to learn, with a stubborn ignorance that expects to find truth in the papers.

In the afternoon Jean was accustomed to walk in the country. Upon his return about four o'clock, the old man always repeated:

"Little goose, why have you been out walking in the hottest time of the day?"

All this while the old man's leg was troubling him. The pain had attacked him in a curious fashion, but it was necessary now to bear it with a bolder front.

One day Dr. Edmond had sent a messenger to him.

"Father Perdrix, Dr. Edmond wants to know if you will come and push his rolling chair. His servant is busy and cannot give him his airing in the garden." And of course the old man went. It is true that Dr. Edmond had struck him from

the Charity Bureau's list, but life is such that one cannot always be particular. He went like an old wheedler, with soft words to smooth the angles of the rich. The doctor had eaten so much for a year that layers of fat were piling up, and day by day one might have counted fresh ones. He was rolled about in a chair among the paths of his garden, for flowers were a passion with him; though who might ever have supposed that he, being of the gentry, would show such patience and infinite care? There was nearly always a gardener to whom he gave advice and who would answer:

"Why, Dr. Edmond, I believe you know more than I!"

It was a tiresome garden, with paths that went too much downhill, and the old man was obliged to hold the chair back with all his strength. Sometimes he was quite breathless and felt a strong inclination to let go and abandon the doctor to the breakneck incline.

"Go on, kill yourself," he would think. "But then, he'd never die; he has too much money."

One day he had felt something burst in his leg, and since then it had been somewhat red with white scales. What he really had was varicose veins.

It is not always possible to think of illness when one is a workman. Often, when his wife complained, the old man would chide her:

"How afraid you are of dying!"

Nevertheless, at times his leg stung, at others, itched, so that he scratched until it seemed on fire. At last he could no longer endure his sock.

"This is what you must do," declared his wife. "You must wash the sore every morning to cool it and put on starch to dry it. Then I will wrap your leg in linen so that your sock will not rub."

This was done every morning. It seemed to him the pain lessened a little. Then he began the same treatment in the evenings, in the hope that the healing would come twice as soon.

Dr. Edmond received him kindly, generously, going even so far as to buy him a drink. Apparently he remembered nothing. Moreover, his rancour was short-lived and he felt a certain lightness of heart, arising from his good digestion.

"Ah, Father Perdrix, it's you. And how is your health?"

"My health? It's very poor. I think my leg is breaking out."

Dr. Edmond's heart was lighter than ever when it was a question of sickness.

"Pay no attention to it," he said. "It's nothing."

He was seated in his wheel-chair; his back was a world, his stomach had two stories, and in pushing him, he seemed to the old man embodied wealth that must be rolled and respected. However, there loomed between them the Charity Bureau, an affair which the old man saw as a visible thing, and which gave him food for thought.

"I push your chair, you chat with me, you are very amiable to-day."

And in the depths of his heart he heard the cries of dogs that would not be silent, rise and resound in the garden.

From the starch he used on his leg a crust formed which he washed cautiously, and when this crust came off in small scales, the skin of the leg appeared the same as before. Then, as if in derision, this second skin burned, and it was necessary to put some fresh starch upon it, after which the third skin appeared as a subterranean fire. He could see the deep foundations of the evil and think of an internal putrefaction, which came forth in layers and increased, like

ill fortune that grows, while devouring the poor. He wound his leg tightly with a band of linen which only slight pricks or itching could penetrate, and thanks to which his limb seemed as inert as a roll of cloth. He dragged it, his sabot sat less securely upon his foot, and the noise of his steps, affected by the weight of his bad leg, re-echoed like a hollow bronze column.

And here he was, pushing the chair, and each effort pulsed through his limbs. Cries rose within him, as though his leg were stuffed with sighs. Aie! And he rolled the doctor heavily, and seemed to himself like an old stone that is forced to bend. "It's my cursed leg that makes me see all colours." The other was a physician. It is true that he was helpless, but his flesh retained an appearance of good health. He had delicate food, but he likewise knew remedies and could reduce an illness almost to nothing. The old man exaggerated his infirmity before Dr. Edmond; although his knee was not bound, through whole afternoons he would carry his leg as though it were stiff, declaring fretfully:

"I could not close my eyes last night. My leg burned as though it did it on purpose." In reality, he slept heavily, except in the morning.

When Dr. Edmond took his medicine, the wretched old man would say:

"If only I knew what I ought to take!"

And the doctor would look at him with the shining eyes of the rich, move his Adam's apple, and seem to be swallowing a dainty morsel. There was no knowing what he thought. Perhaps he no longer remembered that he was a doctor. Name of God! it was very cruel. He needed only to say:

"Show me your leg and I will tell you what must be done."

There was another doctor, but the quality are all alike and wish to be paid. In the days of Father Pinet the sorcerer, one was much better off in case of illness, for he might be called in with scant ceremony. He was an old dotard, but often hit upon the cause of sickness and found the remedy, and a drink at two sous was sufficient pay.

The new doctor seemed a good fellow, a round, decisive little man with a kindly face, but that did not put him within reach of everyone. His price was forty sous.

The old man also remembered a certain occurrence which gave him food for reflection.

One morning as he sat upon his bench, Paul Lartigaud passed.

"Will you lend me twenty sous?" he had asked. "I will pay you back to-morrow." Who would have doubted his good faith? One has always twenty sous in the cupboard. But from day to day, this lad who had perhaps eight hundred thousand francs, horses and carriages, and who did not need to work to be sure of his bread—this lad had never spoken of his debt, and the old man, through timidity, had never dared to remind him—he who was drunk every day, drank Picon bitters and looked half-witted.

The memory of these twenty sous often returned to Father Perdrix. How many times in our lives we have spent twenty sous and later perceived what that small silver piece might have meant and what place it holds in our little joys! But this coin remained a part of the unknown possibility of warm, shining silver, and the old man, bending his head, was aware of this. It seemed to him that the money lay in the earth, where beloved memories are buried, and he could not drive the thought from his mind. With twenty sous more there would have been forty; he could have called the doctor, who would have told him what to do. Then his leg would have

been cured; as of old, there would have been joy in living, and one cannot know what one might do with two legs.

Jean said to him:

"You still look very thoughtful." And when Jean spoke thus, the old man ceased to be thoughtful. They did not carry on long conversations because in this life one can only repeat the same things. Jean sometimes sat on the extreme end of the bench, because he liked the sensation of pressing against the angles of the wood, but the old man could not understand this. "One would think that you were afraid to sit down. Come farther over, there is room enough."

Pierre Bousset said to his son:

"You are at the same level, both of you, one as lazy as the other."

"Formerly he loved to read," mused his mother. "Try to make him open a book again"; and little Marguerite, a trifle more conciliatory, murmured:

"It's too bad, Jean dear."

Indeed he, also, found pleasure only upon the bench. September and October were two months of fine weather when the shadows were a little greyer and floated lightly as a spirit. The bright moments of the day penetrated into his very be-

ing, into his breast, and something within his heart murmured like a dove. These were two old cronies of autumn, two friends of the deep valley where soon the days would grow cold, and each therefore enveloped the other with kind and gentle tenderness; but of this neither could speak.

The old man awoke to unknown days, to days which were not merely days, but which crept into the very marrow of his bones. How he longed to give the lad happiness, to render him some service—some great, good service which would give him cause throughout life to say:

"It is this old man who has been the source of all my good fortune."

He longed to put his love into words, but only thoughts arose within him:

"I understand life so well; if only I might teach him all I know!"

He had an idea in the back of his mind, and sometimes discreetly considered it, though being well aware that a stupid old man cannot bring about such affairs. He had noticed, when he went to the home of Dr. Edmond Lartigaud, that Georgette often asked him:

"What has become of Jean Bousset?"

One day when Jean was there, Perdrix had noticed further that Georgette hovered around

him and sought to draw him aside. Youth finds that natural, for at their age one lives in the midst of occasions and has not sufficient experience to choose among them. She was not an especially pretty girl, her skin being rather dark, but all women are valuable for what one wants of them.

"You are like all the others," he said to Jean. "I have a piece of advice for you. I know a person who would be the very one for you."

Jean must have been very ingenuous not to have understood.

It often happened, when the old man went to push Dr. Edmond's chair, that Jean was also there and accompanied them along the garden paths. Dr. Edmond found pleasure in talking with him because he was an engineer and a title lends weight to a man's words. Then, too, his extreme youth added to the doctor's own superiority, since he could put him in the wrong.

"You think yourself a socialist, but as for me, I do not go so far afield. Take, for example, Father Perdrix: if I owe him sums like four frances ten sous, instead I give him one hundred sous. That is what I call socialism!—and I also offer him a drink."

While Dr. Edmond talked and Jean replied, the old man's thoughts ran on:

"Yes, yes, talk! He is only a workman's son, but he knows far more than you."

At heart he felt pride in seeing them together, clung to Jean, remembered he was his uncle, and took on dignity as an equal of the gentry. However, there was something better than that. Conversation is good, but one should also profit by his youth. The old man longed to cry out:

"Go away! your place is not here. I tell you she is hunting her man!"

The fact is, Georgette had endeavoured to draw Jean towards the kitchen and then would have led him into the rooms where no one would come.

One day, when they were seated upon the bench, the old man put the question directly to Jean.

"How stupid you are, my boy! At your age, I would have climbed walls, and once I did, in the snow. Come now; consider the matter. Here is a slip of a girl who will later have four hundred thousand francs. Profit by this. Once her father knows of it, he will be only too happy to give her to you in marriage. Do not think he could place her as he would wish. He is rich, it

is true; but no gentleman would accept the daughter because of the mother."

"No, no!" answered Jean. "I do not want her. In the first place she is nothing to me, and if she runs after me now, later she will run after others."

"And if she does?" fumed the old man. "Once you have the money, you need not trouble about the woman." He was furious within his soul, but in this life one can never do what one wishes.

There came a day when thinking grew impossible, when what had been a thought was no longer a thought, when what had been a man became a poor sick creature, and what had been a suffering leg filled existence like a cross on Calvary. There came a day when it eclipsed the sky and weighed upon the earth with the weight of dying shoulders, with a cry of animal agony, with the gasping breath of races under the yoke. It was as though the Deluge rose in your blood, and as if great black birds of prey hung in the clouds to drop into the waters. He watched the flood rise; and it rained for far more than forty days: all humanity was carried away by the hovering vultures and would rot like a lemon rind.

For the hurt in his leg had phases and brought with it differing anguish. One cannot know the working of thoughts. They resound in your brain until you feel: "Oh, this throbbing! My head will surely burst!"

Then one day your head does not burst, your thoughts grow piercing sharp, and it is over! There is a rift in the clouds. But . . . "Will they not be obliged to cut off my legs?" He felt it strangely, all swollen, and the veins, filled with blood, were buzzing, making also their queer music, and from head to foot he was only a roaring, a cage of flies, a poor wretch whom misery tortures. And he was sure they would be obliged to cut off his leg.

He sat upon his bench, his head drooping lower and for longer intervals, until his back hurt when he straightened himself. With the toe of his sabot he had been wont to trace furrows, finding diversion in the criss-crossing of lines and letting himself be guided by the whims of his foot. Now, however, with both sabots at once, he scraped the ground, scratched up the earth, vented a final wrath in ruining everything around him, and muttered to himself on rising:

"The devil take me! You might think a pig had lain down where I have been!"

Ordinarily he cared for few people, but now he wanted no one, for misery speaks so loudly and at such length that he could hear no other voice. Jean, however, came to sit upon the bench. The old man had a love for him which lurked in a cranny of his mind and made no noise, but of which he was conscious, as of something we cannot see, but know exists. He was the only one he could endure. Ah! there were many chatterers who hovered by the bench, and made him curse his former habit of talking with people. It was sad to be a civilized man and not be able to clap their mouths shut. There were some who stood about for quarter-hours; in vain he answered them rudely and interrupted their speech—they sucked him dry, rooted him up word by word, thought by thought, and forced him to go down into his mind as though there were room there for all the idle passers-by.

On the other hand, Jean was a friend, like a part of yourself, with which you were concerned when you had a mind to be. They sat side by side and enjoyed the privilege of united hearts that have no need of words.

"Ah, dear child," mused Perdrix, "sit here in silence. I am your old companion. Do you know, when I feel you near me, though I am still

aware of my wretchedness, it seems to me I suffer less."

Then he let his thoughts run on, his aching heart beat and distribute that thin blood of the poor. And his whole leg mingled with and coloured his emotions, grew large and overwhelming, and then came moments when it seemed to rise into his head and settle there like a rotted leg in the place of his brain.

Dr. Edmond died and it was time, for the old man would have been unable to continue pushing his chair. He died suddenly: a vein broke and the physician said the skin of his veins was as hard as a pipe stem.

Marie-Louise, half drunk as usual, whispered: "My God, what will become of me!" However, she had nothing to fear, with her wealth. Paul's and Georgette's tears flowed easily, but they had to search for the former everywhere, before routing him out from the shop of a grocer who sold brandy. This grocer also had a daughter, sixteen, but Paul had not profited by this, and everyone made mock of him because he caressed the women, and did not recognize the moment when one might go further with them.

Old Perdrix was asked to prepare the corpse, and he gazed at this naked body, this good plumpness of good dinners, this soft flesh of the gentry who rub their stomachs on leaving the table. That kind would have to be killed, if money could prevent their dying naturally.

There was a funeral, with a hearse, the subprefect and speeches, and gentlemen in high hats pressed the widow's hand. She was swollen with tears, redder than ever, her face spotted and her skin full of red and white wine.

What a fine household this would be, now that the man was no more! Some lad would come to intoxicate the mother and ruin the girl. There would be quarrelling, dancing; all the blackguards of the region would forgather there, and Paul would die in some corner from bronchitis, before he had drunk his fill. The neighbours would see the end of the eight hundred thousand francs, the estates sold, furious fights, dinners eaten by all the hogs for miles around. There would be every disgrace; low, half-clad women to throw about hundred-franc notes, to insult passers-by from the windows, then to offer them wine. And one fine day the crew would slip away to Paris, leaving behind numberless debts.

Perdrix's leg filled his horizon. He needed not even to lower his eyes, for it seemed to weigh down the lids. Above his head, it hung from the skies, balanced, and remained sometimes within reach of his gaze, with its red skin, its white scales; and it swelled like thoughts that gather and throb at the temples. It filled his every word.

"Ah, the wretched beast!"

And this word "beast" increased, in its turn, like the substance of a restless evil. Again he said:

"There it is, on me, and it will have to be taken off."

It seems that legs are cut with saws and knives. The saw cuts into the bone with its pointed teeth and continues with that shrill sound of saws which you feel in your jawbone. The worst moment is when it reaches the marrow, and when the pain makes you certain it is your very soul that is being sawed. Then the great knives in the flesh, as if handled by butchers, knives so sharp that one fears that he who uses them will cut his fingers. After that there remains to you only a round wound, where you see the dripping blood, the white contour of the bone, and the pink marrow that seems to be oozing.

It was on one of those dull evenings when a sharp wind penetrates one's very marrow. The sky is remote, the street itself seems far away, and autumn pervades the earth and sky from September to the first snowfall, to the end of time.

It is hard to be generous, and money clings to the pocket like a poor thing ashamed. The whole bench was made of dead wood, planks of once-beautiful trees, cut down. Jean, sitting upon it, was struggling with a thought, turning it over in his mind, hesitating like those who are torn between two desires. Sometimes, with a troubled gesture, he tried to express his thought, then ceased, like a man whom fate strikes down before his time. Truly, the old man seemed not to understand.

Ah! Why not meet me half-way? We are companions, and silence separates us more than would many leagues, for we are afraid of our emotions. Why do we not understand what we dare not say? There are weights upon our tongues and kind thoughts have frail arms.

At last Jean rose and, taking one of the old man's hands, raised it from his knee where it lay, drew it toward him, and felt it heavy as a burden, as the shaft of a cart filled with stones.

"Listen to me!" he said abruptly. "Come

into the house. There is something I do not wish to tell you here on the bench."

The old man rose without question. He had that sad docility of the poor whom life leads whither it will. They entered, and Jean, sitting down, grew suddenly tense.

"I want you to be looked after. It is not a great matter. I have more money than you think. And as you will need to buy medicine, you must take these twenty francs. You know what it is—it is money that I do not need to spend. Here! But you must not speak of it to anyone. I am going now; this evening we are to have supper a little earlier."

He went out at once, dropping the money on the table, and it fell heavily as though one had bought weighty things for twenty francs. It had the solidity of gold and that unhoped-for-brightness of swift relief, a relief which he felt would be prolonged by a doctor whose words had the value of money. Then he grew interested in the coin itself, gazed upon the effigy of Napoleon, its stamp well defined, and sucked up the gold, drop by drop, its strength, its warmth, and its glow.

One cannot foretell what will happen. White clouds, grey mists, the stretch of time, the aching heart and bending head. He bowed his fore-

head in his hands, then remembered his glasses, and pushing them up on his brow, his fingers over his eyes, felt two streams run into his palms, overflow, and water the back of his hands. They were warm and salty. A little later his wife returned with her cress.

"Look!" he cried. "See what poor little Jean has done!"

She sat down upon the low bench and, as was her habit, thrust her fist under her chin and moved her head, tired, but impatient of rest, and giving, despite all, a sense of nervous energy to the room. She could say absolutely nothing, and gazed at her husband, her whole soul in her eyes.

The next morning they called the doctor. He was rosy from fresh air and good food; his medical knowledge gave him brisk motions, and from the moment of his entrance he showed himself decisive and rather awe-inspiring. They unrolled the bandages which wrapped Perdrix's leg, and the skin seemed less inflamed than usual. The doctor bent over, looked, pressed his fingers upon several places, then after asking for water to wash his hands, said:

"I will write you a prescription. But what

would you, my poor Perdrix? It is only the rich who can afford to be sick. You could undoubtedly be cured, but it would take long, and above all, it would be very expensive. This medicine will prevent the disease from gaining headway. In the meantime, it will not kill you. Be assured that, at your age, your leg will last as long as you."

They gave him forty sous and he departed without further ado, as there were other sick in the town.

Chapter Three

His was a life in which days moved slowly and led one to the land of closed eyes. Jean rose at seven o'clock, came downstairs, and greeted his parents. They replied with a rasping "good morning" and reared their antagonism before them like a wall. Formerly, in the morning, there was the telling of dreams, or of some memory which the darkness had ripened, and was plucked at the beginning of the day, like fruit of the heart.

The four scarcely ever met except at meals. They dragged their chairs to the table, scraping

the floor, and this was also a subject for remarks.

"Do not knock the tiles so, with your chair."

Once, a tile being already cracked, Jean struck against it so unfortunately that a corner was loosened.

"It is always the same thing. Never in your life will you be careful. If we took no more precaution than you, every year we would be forced to spend money on repairs."

At the morning meal all went well, because in case of danger Jean had only to precipitate their rising from the table. After having eaten, he would pour a little wine into his glass, and Pierre Bousset would glance at him. If sometimes the bottle was empty, the mother would rise, saying:

"I must go down again to the cellar. No one cares here how much I use my feet."

On certain days, however, the noonday meal was tense. This was obvious from the silence which enwrapped each one, and which would have shattered under a blow. Then Jean kept quiet. They did not refuse him food, because health must be maintained and Pierre Bousset, who had known hunger in his youth, understood its weight upon others, and remembered days when one piece of bread would have made life endurable.

Often Marguerite, who was eighteen, and whose appetite was as capricious as a woman, refused everything and put on finical airs. Food was placed upon her plate and she was forced to eat it under her mother's supervision, or else promise not to complain when she had a headache from hunger.

The brother had the faults of the extravagant, and greatly preferred other food to bread. His father cut thick slices from the loaf for him, and at the end of the meal, many of these would be left over—worthless crusts, which hardened in the cupboard, and had to be used for soup.

During these difficult meals, Jean maintained an extraordinary attitude, at once stiff and flexible, foreseeing danger with the instinct of the hunted, and flattening down in his shelter that even the tip of his ear might not betray him. When his mother had poured out the coffee, it was over. Pierre Bousset returned to his work, his wife cleared the table, and Jean, letting his thoughts return, could now enjoy their company.

He rolled his cigarette without fear, for his mother made no complaint, having once said in vain:

"That is the height of stupidity! Smoking! Taking his money to blow it into the air!"

They dined about a quarter past twelve, and sometimes Jean lingered upon the bench after that hour. They decided not to wait for him, since he had nothing better to do than to be on time, and instead of loitering for the sake of loitering, he could appear at the house as well as the others. They thought of him as a strayed sheep, as a goose that might be in the greenyard and to which one paid no attention until sundown.

"You are not even capable of coming home?" and they showed him his dinner growing cold on the plate.

Such scenes happened especially when some thought occurred to them, and Jean strove not to waken their thoughts. He had the meekness of a good son, and murmured to himself: "Yes, Mamma! Yes, Papa!" Very simply indeed he let fall these words, as if the very shadow of a wish would have precipitated a storm. At certain of their gestures, terror seized him, and he would think wildly:

"It is coming! It is here!"

He followed the course of conversation, travelled with caution, forestalling jolts, holes, and falls, and holding himself in hand, eyes to the front, against the moment of destruction. He

answered with reluctance, and was like a little girl who must sit with grown people and feel their eyes fixed upon her.

When a scene would begin, he would stare through the window, where opposite his house was a square planted with chestnut trees. Jean looked at them first, merely as one looks at trees, then with each word his heart went out to them, surrounded the bark, mingled with the leaves, counting them with a fraternal love, rested upon a twig, and tasted the sap like a chestnut.

But Pierre and his wife had suffered deeply. They had created a son in the image of their province, moulding him day by day, and, seeing him grow, had grown in their pride, spread their souls, and saw their old age resting in his shadow. Formerly, everyone had asked news of him. Once the ladies of the château, who made a trip to Paris every autumn, had sent a servant to inquire if Madame Bousset had any messages for Monsieur Jean.

The parents were greatly moved by this and it seemed to them an event of great importance: a proof, by universal consent, of their son's worth.

Tales of Jean were always on their lips; sometimes the father would omit a detail, only to have it remembered by the mother, and their

words sparkled, completed and illumined each other, and came from their hearts like rays of light.

Now they were mortified to the depth of their pride. Wheelwright shops, with their big, open doors, are very large; the work is always a subject of conversation, and the passers-by pause, look, and gesticulate as in the public square. Many things besides light entered through the bay-window. In Pierre's shop, there was the particular case of Limousin, talkative and lazy, who was always staring into space above his head. It was through him that gossip began. Words were let fall, news was asked; on every occasion Jean was part of the news! His father, upon being questioned, answered:

"He was in a factory that closed down," and the listener thought: "Yes, he makes a story to please himself."

At last Pierre Bousset, like Jean, grew afraid of talk. There were times when conversation took strange turns, showed certain leanings, and losing its way completely, ended in the uttermost depths of the curiosity which always lies in the heart of villages:

"By the way, Pierre, is your son leaving soon?"

With one ear he listened to the words of the

moment and with the other heard already the words to come. Sometimes, tired of forestalling them, he fled—too cowardly to parry them—left all the answers which he might have made, and quitting his shop, went into his house and sat down. Limousin winked his eye.

Finally Pierre Bousset could stand no more, and said one evening to Limousin:

"Look here, I know one thing, and that is that you gather about you all the good-for-nothings in the town. That is far from doing my work."

Limousin was shocked.

"Indeed, that's news! That's the first time you've told me this."

"I want no more of it," said Pierre Bousset flatly. "You may take it or leave it."

Limousin in his turn answered flatly:

"Come now! I am paid by the piece. Is it your money that I waste? Oh, well, if you take it that way, I'll leave."

"Then go at once. I will give you your pay."

Limousin was bewildered with surprise.

"Heavens above! I'm sure such a thing never happened before with any employer. Just wait! You pretend to be shrewd, but you will hear more of this than you think."

They parted awkwardly; they had worked together for five years.

As a result of this quarrel, Pierre was possessed of a cold rage, which sometimes stirred in his heart. He scarcely ever let it appear, but was content with bending his head, champing the bit, and increasing his silence, as if under the pressure of a new life of the spirit. This was a time of great silence in the house. Jean confronted each one of them; they again became aware of him, and returned to the subject with that unhealthy meekness of men stricken by a scourge.

"Well, after all, at twenty-two, he will find himself again," declared his mother. "It is only childishness. He thinks people can do as they like in this world."

"You may say what you please," answered the father, "he has the eyes of one who does not reason like other men."

They lived, all four of them, with sidelong glances, with silence in the depths of their hearts, and such heavy emotions that sometimes they felt as if they were waking from sleep. The hours lost themselves in the room, chimed in the clock, and no longer carried away those currents of common thought that are usual in fami-

lies. They lived, all four, with their faces to the wall, sharply turning their backs on each other and withdrawing into themselves, until it seemed they would lose their reason.

One day, when the father said at table: "So far as one can see, he is not even capable of finding another place," Jean thrust back at him:

"Well, what the devil is that to you?"

The coarse words leaped to his lips and suddenly a lump rose from his breast to his throat.

"Ah! What the devil is that to me? It's that I'm feeding you, and that you're a good-for-nothing, an idiot, an ill-mannered fool!"

"You boast enough to feed a crowd. But when you're with gentlemen, mending their carriages and licking their boots for hundred-sou pieces, you're not like the same man."

They exchanged but few words, stiffening themselves at opposite ends of the table, like two cocks fighting for the same hen. Then they approached one another. Their heads were thrown back, their eyes blazing, and their thick red mouths under the moustaches convulsed with anger. A snap of the jaws sent a quiver through their cheeks, and with another breath fists shot out. The women also rose, shrinking like frightened children.

"Stop, Jean!" cried his mother.

"Stop, Father!" cried Marguerite.

"Damn you!" shouted both the men. And they advanced again. Pierre stretched his fists behind him.

"Hold me! Otherwise I'll slap his face."

"Don't touch me," said Jean. "What the hell if you are my father? I'll dance on your head!"

Then he snatched up his plate.

"Ah, so you feed me! Well, here's what I think of that!"

And he flung his plate to the floor as a man might strike down an idol. Another fit of rage seized his feet, and he kicked the table violently, as though to destroy the house. The bottle, the *casserole*, and the glasses were shattered. Pierre's glass was an old one, which dated back before his marriage. He used often to say:

"My glass is my life. It will be a bad day for me when I break it."

Jean licked his lips with pleasure.

"Aaaah . . ." said the women.

He struck again, and each blow quivered through his legs, his back, and his shoulders as a badly needed relief.

"And that is not all. I am going away. You

need not feed me any longer. At least, if I die, you cannot say it is money lost."

He possessed a large crooked cane which Perdrix had given him. The old man cut them in the hedges and, after putting them through a long preparation, presented them to you with the manner of the poor who are giving their very selves. Jean seized his cane in his right hand, his hat in his left, and opening the door, slammed it too behind him.

At first the high road was straight, then turned, and finally climbed a slope. From the top of the slope could be seen the church steeple, but with two more steps the little town was gone. Gone too was joy; and each footfall beat like a pulse, in rhythm with the heart of mankind.

He walked with springing step and his cane seemed a lever that might lift the earth. The air was dry and fraught with the sense of sober well-being which the breath of true liberty inspires. He found it was half-past one, as he still had his watch. Unsuspected strength tautened the muscles of his back, surged up within him, and increased with every step, as though it would continue to the end of his road, to the end of all things.

Around four o'clock he reached a village, turned aside to avoid the houses along the road, because he knew them, and left behind all his past. Then he chose his way at random. The high road lay before him, the hills ran to meet him, the distance between them lessening like a ribbon that is wound, and a little before six another village came into view. It was growing dusk, the countryside was brown with October, and the wind blew from the cross roads, howling like wolves: "Hou, Hou, Hou!"

Frail mist floated over the fields; his heart quivered with the sense of autumn, and night rose insensibly from the earth to the clouds. The first houses, with their glimmering lights, seemed to contain the warmth and stir of good circulation in the blood.

Only six or seven francs were left, since Jean had been prodigal in buying tobacco, and the old adage held true once more: *Si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait.* . . . Nevertheless, he entered a wayside inn. Around the circle of lamplight women were sewing, and their quiet hearts seemed to shine forth and wrap them in drowsiness. An omelette was made for him, and with it he drank a little wine, already settling himself to economize. When he rose, he brushed the crumbs

from his clothing, paid, and looking about for the last time, felt himself growing numb, little by little, and he shivered in the street like a man who has lost his woollen garments.

He continued to walk, but now the night closed down about him and all his soul was groping. Suddenly he did not know where he was going. The road rose under his steps, and the shadows seemed to run and fasten about his feet like fetters. However, the warmth of the wine remained with him, a kindly comrade; but his thoughts were fleeing away, fluttering around his head and off into the nearby fields where the darkness swallowed them up. But—what was he doing? And consciousness returned to him, a consciousness that rose from the very depths, where the cold penetrated, and which insisted on sound reason.

It was October and the wind, sweeping across the open country, cut him to the quick. Twice he met carriages with lanterns, and their light glowed like the hearts of the houses where the carriages would stop. We muffle ourselves up in warm wraps; happiness is to be found in peace; and there are clocks which mark the life of the country where nothing changes.

He was traversing a forest, and came upon

something which had delighted him in his childhood. He noticed, on the right, one of the little huts made with branches, called road-men's huts. A very slight shelter, but a welcome rest with a dry ground for wanderers. It had three good sides against the wind, and vagabonds were kings when it did not blow through the opening. As a little child, passing in a carriage with his father, he would say:

"Those are the cottages of God; they have grown up along the road, so that the beggars may stop and sleep with their packs. Father, they have a hole in the roof and two stones for the fire."

He went into the hut, and though he was not very tall, had to lower his head in entering. He sat down upon a stone and then, having no desire to smoke, he leaned his elbows upon his knees. October was growing sharper and a foretaste of November; the wind was boisterous, stirring the dead leaves and rustling under the trees with that cold menace which sweeps away our last traces of courage.

There were no houses in the woods. Tom Thumb climbed among the branches and cried:

"There is a light yonder! It is the shepherd's star!"

First he blew out the candle, then groped his way into the rough bed-clothes and, wrapping his arms about his breast, rocked himself to sleep, and the warmth of the bed was grateful.

Jean was alone! Solitude weighed more heavily upon him, the more he thought of it; he was so profoundly alone that no other thoughts rescued him from himself, and loneliness stirred in his breast like the pangs of a strange hunger.

It is hard to realize how much night is like the end of the world. A last taste of omelette remained with him, and this alone preserved him from despair. Autumn earth is damp and the mist of the valley penetrates one's being. He was seated upon a stone and touched it with his hand; then it seemed as if all the thoughts in his mind followed his hand, touched the stone, partook of its nature, and fell back into heaps. He felt them go down, some already flattened out, upon which others tumbled, struggling still, and many fell which seemed to pursue one another and die in layers. That great longing to set out, the eagerness for the journey, the intoxicating halts of free men, and that happiness which spreads two white wings before the eyes of wanderers and guides them—all this seemed to grow small, to retreat within itself and bend its head

for ever. Jean also bent his head, and there was left to him only the romantic madness of some unknown Jesus, only a body on a stone in an autumn night. The hut arched its thin roof like a backbone of earth and wood, like some thread-bare misery. And he had nothing upon which he might stretch himself to sleep, and night was pressing thicker upon him. It is a strange idealism that children adopt and that makes them cast away the good things of life, as one throws aside a doll! He was very little, foolish and weak, and the whistling wind fluttered his thoughts before blowing them out. He began to weep.

Then he rose, again lowering his head at the door, and went out. On all sides of the road, the woods deepened the darkness and stretched away interminably, as though at their end might lie all the countries of the wind. He was hesitating still, looking at both sides of the question, weighing the shame of return.

"I thought that madness went ahead, and that men were lost," he recounted later.

Suddenly he swung about, flung off his hesitation, and set out: he was saved! He walked for a long time, breathed deeply in the darkness, and walked again. He had done with following

the open road! He was very tired, but kept his head high. His nostrils quivered, and he returned like a horse who senses his stable from afar.

About one o'clock at night he arrived. Rapping on the door with his stick, he heard a deep voice call out:

"Who is there?"

When he answered: "It is I!" the door swung open at once. Old Perdrix was in his night-shirt, heavy sabots on his feet, and a blue cotton night-cap on his head. He did not wait for Jean to enter, but putting his arms about his shoulders, sought his mouth in the darkness.

Then—

"Wait, my boy, while I light the lamp."

His wife, lying in the other bed, with her old woman's night-cap on her tired head, pushed back the covers, rose on her elbow, and flung sleep from her.

"So you have come back, my dear?"

"I said to myself, they do not understand this child," the old man later recounted. "But as for me, I do not believe he will go away like that. And I planned for his return."

The lamp was smoky and without a chimney,

and its flame leaped and flickered wildly before settling down to a steady light.

"Are you going back home?" continued Perdrix.

"No, no, no!" Jean answered hotly.

"That's what I thought," said the old man. "I must get into bed, or I will catch cold, and I can talk to you just as well there."

The tassel on his cotton night-cap stuck straight up like a flame. Jean began to laugh:

"I see you have on a dunce-cap!"

"Faith, yes, I have on a dunce-cap, and I tell you it's stiff."

The whitewashed room wavered around the lamp and darkness stretched long fingers into the corners. The old man climbed into bed; the frame cracked, then settled into quiet.

"There is only one thing to do. You must sleep in my wife's bed and she will come and sleep with me."

"Yes, Jean," said the old woman, drawing her arms from under the cover, "that is what we must do."

Then she rose—she always preferred things done at once.

"And you mustn't be afraid that something

will happen," cried Perdrix. "I am no longer good for anything!"

She had the thin shoulders of the old, and she did not always understand jesting.

"You have no occasion to say that. Let him get into bed."

The old man drew over to the edge and sat up; Mother Perdrix climbed in behind his back and slipped under the covers against the wall, saying:

"Give me some room."

It was easily accomplished and Jean undressed at once, that he might find the bed still warm. But suddenly the old woman remembered:

"Oh, my child! I have not even asked if you were hungry!"

"I was expecting that," answered Jean. "But I am not, for I dined at the tavern, and perhaps better than you, without knowing it."

"Will you blow out the lamp before getting into bed?" asked Perdrix.

A second later and the house fell back into silence. Jean lay like a log; his body heavy with fresh air. Mother Perdrix slept like the cress, like the fields wrapped in night. The old man was thinking still, aware of the two hearts under his roof. Jean began to snore; poor child, he

must be very tired, and besides, during that long evening, in spite of what he might say, he must have been afraid. Perdrix did not move, yet he remembered that his wife slept as lightly as a watch-dog. He did not close his eyes throughout the night. One took up too much room, the other snored too loudly, yet not for an instant, even in his thought, did he utter a complaint or a sigh. He might easily have pushed his bedfellow to one side: never mind, each must sleep.

About five or six o'clock he rose, and tried not to make too much noise with his wooden shoes.

Chapter Four

How short are the fine days! Jean and Perdrix lived side by side. October moved gently to its close and from the blue heavens floated delicate mists, veiling the earth in tender melancholy. They could still sit on the bench during the day, and there they remained seated, touching one another and gathering from the street, the houses, and the passers-by, quiet thoughts which they laid at each other's feet. The old man had but one regret.

"I am sorry, Jean, that I can give you only soup and potatoes. Do you know what would have been better? It would have been better for

you to eat with them and sleep here with us!"

Poor old Mother Perdrix cooked for them, and did not take long to prepare the pot, move the bucket of water, and light the small fire which smoked badly because there were no bellows in the house. Winter was more comfortable on account of the stove. At noon she used a chafing-dish and they often dined on food warmed over from the evening before. She was very spare, and her back was beginning to bend; not that she was becoming hump-backed, but her spine was sharp and showed beneath her dress. For everything wears out at length, and old utensils hold in their pitiful sides unknown fissures which some day will crack and empty them.

Jean's mother came one morning. She laid her hand upon the pocket of her apron and mounted the threshold steps with the heavy manner of a simple-minded ox, and said:

"Here, you! Your father sent me. You turned over to us two hundred francs when you arrived, and your father does not want you to accuse us of having kept your money."

She drew the two bills from her pocket and, laying them on the table, turned her head for a last word before departing:

"I cannot leave you without saying a few

words. You have made your parents objects of ridicule. We have done for you what no one before us has done. Of all our privations there remains to us only the mortification of having endured them, and you strut about, because you are smart, because we have filled your stomach, and because our stupidity has served to make you think yourself better than your parents. It's sad!"

She departed without further speech. Not a word was spoken, and she stalked down the stairs as though her very dress would have sucked up speech.

Suddenly Mother Perdrix woke up to find herself very thin, and to a friend noticing her one day, it came as a surprise. Something had gone out of her, almost in a night.

"It's not astonishing," the neighbours said. "She is worn out supporting her lazy old man."

Her ears were white, her cheeks sunken, and her eyes grew big and vacant as she stared at the ground. She had a distracted air and did not know what was the matter. Only once, returning from her housework, did she recount her troubles:

"I cannot understand it! I was not polishing

harder than usual, but it seemed as if my bones fell out of me."

That afternoon she went off for her cress and, returning with her basket full, exclaimed:

"Just see how much I have gathered!"

The next morning, upon rising, she said:

"I must jump out of bed quickly, for I know if I do not do so at once, I will stay here all day."

But the following day she wakened her husband.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear! I cannot get up. But I must, in order to make the soup!"

About seven-thirty, after he had lighted the fire, she slipped on her stockings, skirt, and jacket, set the soup boiling, and poured it over the bread. She had no wish to eat, and gazed about her, at the house, the street, and at life with a far-away distaste, as though she would cast it all from her.

After breakfast her husband went out to make known to the wife of Roux the baker that Mother Perdrix was not well this morning.

"Dear me," answered Madame Roux, "if that continues, we will be obliged to find another housekeeper."

During his absence, the old woman was sitting in a chair, wondering if she would be able to

sweep the room. Jean was bending over her, with the kind eyes of a little girl, like a bending fountain.

"Tell me where the pain is."

"Oh, my dear child, I am like the old. I have pain everywhere."

She contented herself with making Jean's bed; then she swept, leaning from time to time on the handle of the broom. Thus she dragged on, until ten o'clock, when she threw herself upon the bed, fully dressed. She did not sleep, but rest seemed to refresh her.

At noon, nevertheless, she had to set about preparing the meal. She rose, and peeling the potatoes, cut and fried them. While the two men were eating, she leaned her elbow upon the table and gazed at their plates, enjoying, like all good cooks, the pleasure of seeing people eat. Her husband had a mind to be vexed.

"Do eat! When you are sick, you need most to be strengthened. You indulge yourself too much!"

But in the afternoon she was very happy. She lay upon her back, folded her hands, and with the curtains drawn, became one with her bed. Not a sound penetrated from the street, since her

husband had closed the outside shutters, and the shadowy room seemed a beautiful country of sleep.

The following day drifted by in the same fashion. The old man, however, conquered his habit of expecting everything ready to his hand, and shook off the thick layer of idleness which had accumulated upon him like fat.

"Leave it to me. I will make the soup myself."

But she would not listen. She suffered enough chagrin in seeing him light the fire!

Since, on the previous day, she had not completed her housework, she now made the two beds, swept and dusted the rooms, dragging herself from corner to corner, pressing her hands under her arm-pits, and resting against the walls for support. Twice she was obliged to sit down, not daring to trust herself to lean back in the chair, ready to move on, and under her dress her bones were sharp as in a drawn fowl. Finally she went back to bed and spread herself out, like a poor mother partridge that drags a tired covey.

At noon she rose. She had kept a little broth to sustain her, but she suffered greatly, and eating seemed a task to be reasoned about. The afternoon passed as before, in the oblivion that fell

from the curtains, with intervals of forgetfulness, long intervals which buried her under the covers.

Jean and Perdrix remained upon the bench, and their thoughts filed past with the hours. Jean was troubled at seeing her suffer. Human misfortune pierced his soul like a constant injustice, and he could not understand why life itself should be less good than the goodness of kind hearts. Sometimes he rose, went in to see her, and drew aside the curtains. She looked at him as at the final thing one wishes to see, and for which one has made a long journey, and was roused from her weariness of a poor old woman, forgetting herself, as much as the sick can forget. He embraced her devotedly and she kissed his cheeks, her old lips lingering upon them.

"Do you want me to call the doctor?"

"No, dear boy, keep your money. Perhaps I shall be better to-morrow."

Ah! No, she was not better the next day. She wished to rise, as upon the other two days, but scarcely had she set her foot upon the floor before they were obliged to give her a chair. She staggered, and the old man was decidedly vexed!

"In God's name, will you always be so foolish? I have told you often enough to stay in bed. We can make the soup as well as you."

But even in bed she was not at ease. It was ridiculous madness; they set a pillow behind her back which raised her so that she might see, and if her arms and legs could not support her, at least her mind took part in the cooking.

She did not miss a glance, and sometimes, leaning forward, she thrust in a word:

"You put in too much butter . . . there! . . . Put in another pinch of salt."

"Give me some peace!" cried Perdrix. "I don't need your advice."

She watched them eating and said to Jean:

"Perhaps there is not enough soup. Eat a piece of bread and cheese, my dear."

Then the old man swept, and though she made no comment, she followed the movement of the broom, mentally scratched the corners where you need to pursue dust with a point, and made up her mind to chase away the spiders in the morning. She could not refrain from saying:

"I will try to get up during the day to make Jean's bed."

Throughout the afternoon she had nothing to concern herself about, because no one did anything. She was wholly alone in the house. The very walls held a deep silence, the shutters hid the daylight, and life stretched out in the room

like a sleeping goddess. The bed stood in its corner, with its curtains like extinguishers, under which stirred a feverish, insistent thought, a buzzing in the head as of flies, and the eternal need of being the housekeeper, and not sleeping when work awaits.

In the evening they forced her to eat: her husband put a plate of soup in her hand, and bade her take it. The spoon paused on the way from plate to mouth, as on a journey; the old woman would rest her elbow on the bolster, waiting until renewed strength came to her, and begin to eat again, with a courage waning each instant. She could scarcely hold herself up, and would have needed a strong remedy to restore her shattered state. She spread over her bed like an old sack whose contents were no longer in place, and where everything was broken. Her back seemed pressing on the base of her neck, and her stomach filled her chest with deep discomfort.

Old Perdrix climed into bed, saying: "We will see to-morrow how things go"; then time itself went to bed, full of daily cares. The old man set the bed creaking before settling into his place, and Jean's snoring rose like an untroubled conscience. Night slept everywhere, in the house, in the streets, under the skies, and seemed

a pause for rest, before taking up life again as it had begun.

Mother Perdrix stirred silently in her corner, turning quietly in order not to disturb the sleep that surrounded her. About one o'clock, however, sighs escaped from her lips: louder sighs, which at first were scattered, then seizing some organ within her, grew longer. And at two o'clock her husband heard her utter, three times, a complaining sound: "Ah! Ah! Ah!"

"Are you sick?" he asked in the darkness, but she did not answer. He touched her then, and his blood turned to ice: she no longer moved. Jean was still snoring.

Two days later, the funeral procession descended the street. Jean and Perdrix preceded the row of children: Jacques and François accompanied by their wives, and Marie with her husband.

Their sorrow was the greater, springing as it did from what might have been a joy. Marie had truly said, the previous evening:

"We are all together once more. The other time it was she who did the cooking for us."

"Ah, my poor dear, she will do it no more!" the old man had answered.

There were many mourners, because she had been courageous, and because they knew Jacques was a railroad mechanic. It was a dark and solid group that walked, and it resembled a square cut out of a little town on Sunday, with the black clothes and swinging arms. The old man held in his hand his large holiday hat, and went through the necessary ceremony, knowing how to endure all blows. Jean regarded him: his head was bowed, almost beaten; his temples were sunken under his hollow brow, and one sensed his destiny. He had been born to descend this street behind a coffin and to clatter his sabots on the cobble-stones; to wear dark glasses that one might not know if he wept; and one could not even be surprised at Jean's attending him, for the blind must be supported.

If there were buzzing sounds in his head, they were the very ones which buzzed round about the bench, almost formless, like thoughts without words: His wife . . . the earth . . . the return to the house . . . seven years like a leaden weight . . . just the same, I must be a famous good-for-nothing, not to be able to eat . . . and the priest with his *oremus*, for such are paid for their words . . .

He departed, sat down in the church, in a

funeral church that echoed with emptiness, went down the little street, so quickly descended, and arrived at the cemetery. It was as if life paused there, and an *ora pro nobis* fell with a spadeful of earth—poum!—into the grave.

He returned to the house, where they opened the shutters which death had closed, and where the new light, suffusing the empty room, seemed to have reddened eyes. The buzzing thoughts were heavy, his head drooped forward, his wife was no longer here: no more cress, no more housekeeping; the bench was opposite: no more bread!

"Ah! Come, do not grieve so, father!" said his children.

They were good children: they had all cried.

"Above all, kiss the dear little ones for me," he said to them.

"Father Perdrix, you must eat to keep well," declared the wife of Pierre Bousset, and she glanced at Jean, very thin and small in his corner.

The daughters-in-law had made a stew, for on this day also he must have meat. At first he could not touch his food; then he began to eat. The daughters-in-law ate, Jacques and François ate, and silence struck the plates with the knives, for the Other, in going, had taken away the noise of the house. But there was an air of constraint

among them; they kept their eyes straight ahead, as though fascinated by the centre of the round table. The men dared not look at one another, their thoughts grew and seemed to swell the silence until it threatened to burst like an artery. At last this became cowardice. Sometimes a half-spoken phrase stopped abruptly, turned back, sought shelter, and glanced about, like an animal on the watch. The old man held his peace, his head heavy with the burden of waiting! He swallowed his meat, not greatly surprised—because in this life the old are often abandoned. Jacques had a good heart, but was hurried by the approaching hour of departure.

"As for me, father, I will send you a hundred sous every month."

Perdrix said nothing and counted: three and a half sous a day! He had a habit of making such calculations. Jacques continued:

"Of course you know, when one has children . . . However, if you are in need, you must send me word. And then, too, father, now that you are all alone, they will not refuse you at the Charity Bureau."

"Oh, indeed, I will not ask them!" exclaimed his father. "As they turned me out, they would take me back, but I have got the better of them."

"Why, that is madness!" cried François. "True pride consists in having a full stomach. I do not speak of my brother; he earns more than I. But I will also try to send you something."

"It is easy for you to say so," said Jacques. Everyone knew what he earned. "But I do not say that I will not give him, from time to time, more than I promise. You do as much, yourself."

And big Marie waved her big arms.

"Do not be afraid, father. We will take care of you. I shall send you provisions—vegetables, coffee, tobacco, and also sugar. And then the children shall come to see you and they will not be a burden. Once more I say, do not be afraid."

Jean lowered his eyes; he had his own way of suffering when the motives of men were not clear.

Chapter Five

THERE are certain simple things: two and two make four. The two comrades became two comrades of winter, with the stove between them, and its roaring filled the stove-pipe. They had nothing to say: the flame talked for them. The old man felt complete indifference: "Let us burn our wood, and if that gives out, we will burn the house." Not for the world would he have made an effort.

"I want to see what will happen."

Sitting upon the bench, sitting upon a chair, Life might stay, Death might come—he con-

tinued to stare at his feet. Thoughts no longer came to him as of old, when he felt himself comfortable beside the stove and getting warm occupied his mind. Then, "I am warming myself," he would think. Now his heart was dry, his bones hardened beside the fire, and all contact with humanity ceased at his head, like cries of alarm at the stones of an empty bell-tower.

One day Jean told him an amusing story.

"Listen, Daddy, I am surely going to get a position in Paris. You must go with me."

"Ah, indeed, my friend, people would surely think me crazy." He was sixty-eight, his leg was swollen, his thoughts were dull, and he lived upon Jean's two hundred francs, with bread and cheese to make them last the longer. His wife, in dying, had left but thirty francs, and he had not yet paid the priest. His village soul was encrusted over, and the very stones of the house would not let him go.

Jean received a letter and spoke for the second time:

"Well, Daddy, I think we shall soon be off."

"You are foolish, my boy; leave the unfortunate in their ditch."

He could not be moved, his feet clung as firmly

to the floor as his body to the chair, and to set him in motion it would have been necessary to set in motion a whole system, to transport a little town, and give to an old man's experience the new life which wells in the hearts of those who wander.

For the third time, after another letter, Jean said firmly:

"Pack your trunk. In a week we will be there."

The old man suddenly ducked his head, as one takes a dive, hunched his shoulders as though he were chilly, and sat down so heavily that his gloomy thoughts surrounded him almost visibly.

Jean began to laugh, exclaiming: "Rebel as much as you will. It makes no difference. I shall take you along!"

It was a qualified madness, which lingered from minute to minute, struggled, and shook the very furniture of the room. He had only to look at the two beds, the cupboard, and the beam to feel the weight of possessions at sixty-eight, and to understand the human limits beyond which one can never set his feet.

But Jean said again:

"You have no excuse to make. Your com-

munity has finished with you. You would remain here with all your misery, like an ignorant old man, who has not known how to deal with anything, and will not know what to say."

Thus Jean spoke and he did not speak in vain. From the thousand fissures of his old brain, through the cracks of each new day, his thoughts ebbed out like gas, and emptied his mind like a falling balloon. One could now hold out a hand to him, poor and old, saying: "Follow me," for he had lost his way. The ways of God stop short at walls, foreheads strike against the stones, and bewildered heads droop, waiting for support.

He considered the little town in his soul, visioning it in its entirety, with Dr. Edmond whose veins had burst from overeating; with the gentry who had servants and whose grandeur kept them remote from the world at large; with wheelwrights who are harnessed to carriages and drag life in their wake, as oxen drag a cart on the highway; with the trades of the anvil that one strikes and which break; with the echo of words; with Charity Bureaus, where pity does not pardon one happy day; with the satiety of those who eat; with the silences round the poor; with afternoons which weigh upon their backs; with its classes and social distinctions; with its soul which money

warms and expands; with scandal that lifts a curtain; and his poor old wife who bore off his bread to her grave.

Then he grew hard, in his turn, considered the house with an unfeeling eye, and with decision broke his bonds of attachment, for he realized the cruelty of a world wherein there is nothing to be loved.

They had to work rapidly and he became the victim of haste. They busied themselves with settling all things, with leaving their lives behind them in a week; sold the beds, the cupboard, the table; tore away the furniture as one tears away the flesh from a sick body; secured little enough money from their chattels, but felt themselves freed from sorrows and as light as a body healed by an operation.

He paid the priest for the burial, the proprietor for the house, gathered his sous together, counted one hundred and fifty francs, and was shocked at the thought of having suffered hunger in the midst of things worth money. Little Jean had an equal amount . . . they set out for Paris with a capital of three hundred francs, and could live, in God's name! despite the dogs of little towns, which watch for the poor to die upon their benches. Upon the eve of departure, a last

thought tore him: he bent his head, reflecting, weighing the contradictory madness of remaining or going, analysed the depths which beggars reach who knock at charitable doors, and also understood the exodus, the no-matter-where of those who are lured by every mirage, because they have lost everything, because every new adventure is a reprieve, and if one must die, it is better to go afar and lick the dry sands of the Sahara, which is the Promised Land, than the bones of poverty.

They departed one Sunday morning, at five o'clock, in the sharp, dry cold, which cut the face and gave a foretaste of the streets where the breeze is like a draught. The wind blew steadily that morning, along the fifteen miles which separated them from the station. The old man was filled with astonishment, for in spite of everything, in spite of Jacques the mechanic, never had he seen the railroad. Bah! old stupid, he no longer tried to learn anything, and said simply:

"Then that's where we're to get in!"

And he wanted at once to climb into a first-class carriage. Following Jean, he installed himself and would have began conversation immediately, except for his companion, who did

not like demonstrations. He had on his fine blue blouse and his hat which was almost new, and these gave him a substantial air, completed by polished sabots, like a rich hog-merchant who is not dressed in quite his finest.

"Do not wear your best," Jean had said, "for the train will soil them."

But he had answered in annoyance:

"Indeed, I wish to look well. I must do you honour." And on the way he exclaimed:

"All the same, it's queer to see myself in these clothes."

They arrived in Paris at the *Gare d'Orléans*, about five o'clock. The old man had sewed his money in an inside pocket. Jean wished to hail a cab to carry their trunk, but Perdrix demurred:

"How much does it cost? Is it far from here to our room?"

"It costs forty sous. We are about fifteen minutes away, on the Ile Saint-Louis."

"In that case, don't move! There's no need to let them earn forty sous in fifteen minutes. I will carry the trunk on my back."

He settled it firmly, seized the handle with both hands, and walked—a strong man still—with lowered head and firm steps, to their lodg-

ings, where he set the trunk down in the alley, exhaling a long-drawn breath.

It was a furnished lodging-house with two main buildings: one on the quay—with carpeted stairs to the second floor—to which the poplars of the Seine gave a charm as of a fine neighbourhood, and the other upon a court, built with the utmost stupidity of stone and plaster, faded, yellowed, and damp. In this building they had secured a room for twenty francs, on the fourth floor, where the bureau was losing its drawers, and shared in the ancient dampness; where the iron bed had suffered under heavy households, and the rusty stove shed its chill upon the walls. However, the round table was made like the one at home, and it was a pleasure to imagine it holding the bread and cheese.

"To be sure, we will not be badly off here," exclaimed Old Perdrix. "What surprises me is to see how small it is. Yet, what do you expect? We will get around that by less moving about."

That evening they went to a wine-merchant's shop on the other side of the water. The line of gas lights stretched up like an arch, and slipped

away out of sight into the distance that hid the houses and carriages, and where the noises shattered the darkness of evening, like an assault upon doors of bronze.

"Your Paris bewilders me," said the old man. "There is too much ear-splitting noise."

They ate beefsteak, beans, and Brie cheese, for fifty sous, and found that one does not dine badly in Paris. One thing gave rise to reflections in Perdrix's mind.

"Listen to me, my boy. I am going to keep our money, because I will remain at home and will thus run less risk of having it stolen. I will be the manager."

Then they retraced their steps, proceeded to unpack the trunk, and the old man was afraid of the clothes rack where his poorly concealed garments might tempt the people who roam about lodging-rooms. However, he consoled himself by going to bed about a quarter past eight, but he had made a bad miscalculation. From all sides a procession began on the stairs, with words that could be understood, and such stupid words that one had a mind to reprove them; and in the neighbouring rooms a deafening chatter of men and women startled him anew, like the very mad-

ness of speech, the insanity of tongues, and the old man wondered how a family could have so such to say.

"What is the matter with all of them? They must be having a spree."

They continued their life together. Old Perdrix was soon well known in the house because of his heavy sabots, which pounded the stairs, reverberated along the walls, and marked his every step with a martial sound, as though he were a piece of heavy artillery. Jean worked from nine-thirty to five, as draughtsman in a railroad company, at one hundred francs a month, and life was very different from that time which he had called "the time when Jean had a pocket of gold."

The old man made *café au lait* in the morning, though he had to be begged to do it for a long time, because soup is more filling and costs no more than bread and water, and he seemed to be spending in smoke good weighty money which should sustain their stomachs. He announced himself to the sleepers at seven o'clock, striking against everything, and making the dawn resound with his heavy steps. Someone complained, but he answered flatly:

"Good God, as if everyone had not a right to live his own life!"

At noon their meal consisted of ten sous' worth of larded veal, four sous' worth of fried potatoes, and three or four sous' worth of cheese. The old man made his purchases in the little side streets, watched over the weighing, and once, at the pork butcher's, struck the wooden scales with his thumb, exclaiming:

"You must give full measure."

The first few times he adventured out timidly, noticing the street corners—"Good, I turned to the right there"—remembered his observations, chose his landmarks, sometimes regarding them with uncertainty on the return trip, and thought: "If only I can find the house again." He never succeeded in remembering his address:

"It is Quay . . . Quay . . . What do you call it?"

However, it was only a half-difficulty, since he could recall the number. One day he found a cheese called "Bourgogne cheese," thick slices of which could be had for only three sous, and he counted upon its serving as a basis for their meals. But in actual use, the taste of the stuff did not hide the taste of dry bread, and each of them swallowed his slice like so much plaster.

Jean wished to continue in the evenings his folly of having meat, but the old man got it into his head to make soup, and since it seemed that the life of Paris wore on the nerves, he made the soup a little thicker. Each one consumed a plateful and Perdrix would murmur approvingly:

"Ah! this will build up our nerves!"

The afternoon was strange, sitting beside the stove full of coal. He would spread out his legs, bend his back, and seizing the poker, scratch little furrows around him on the floor. This was a time of silence, when all the small households were at their work—sewing women and men of the building trades—and when the sound of the shovel in the coal-scuttle aroused anew his old ideas of economy and called to mind the wood in the country, which roars and warms you at small cost. He burned fifteen sous a day: that was worse than tobacco smoke, and he thought it would have been better had he had the courage to remain in bed all winter, in order to keep warm under the covers.

Over and over he counted his expenses: six sous for *café au lait*, twenty-two or twenty-three sous for dinner, and a dozen sous for supper, without including the laundry. He realized they could not live on a hundred francs, and

built up wild plans, such as going himself to the wash-house.

He might have walked about, gaping at the store fronts, but he could not read, was afraid of getting lost, and he would not follow the four ways in front of the house, from one bridge to another, dreading ridicule and the cold wind along the banks of the Seine. He saw far ahead on these winter afternoons, and endured the first two months when the three hundred francs of their joint fund provided for necessities, but it was hard to condemn them to go, and not to keep the good things in reserve, in a corner where the soul might rest and close its eyes. He thought of the months to come, relived his past, and remained two months more, already in great poverty, beside the poor child who would open his mouth like a bird and whom he had to feed, because of his simplicity.

But when Jean returned about six o'clock, all disturbing thoughts were put aside, even the voice of prudence was silenced, and he felt that for Jean's sake duty should be forgotten, in order to preserve his tranquillity. They were taken for grandson and grandfather, and would laugh, looking at one another, and relishing the two words, while their mutual love was strengthened.

Jean read rather late, burning petroleum, and the old man went to bed, sleeping until midnight, after which his soul kept vigil in the room. He lay upon his back, with open eyes, and his thoughts were flung out as from a volcano. He would gladly have risen, except for the coal, and, could he have remained barefooted, would have passed the night more at his ease, seated, ready to walk, to defend himself, for he was afraid of things. He rose early—he could not help it—and while he was lighting the stove, reproached himself for his debauch, and thought of two sous wasted.

One afternoon, as usual in the little room, the coal in the stove was settling down in layers, struggling to go out, and only the use of the poker served to keep it alive. The old man was stirring it up. All at once a landslide seemed to take place in his head, as if all the thoughts of his life in this room were crumbling in a heap, and in the void thus produced there suddenly arose a voice, unheard until now, which cried: "Paris!"

Thus ideas which we have brooded upon unconsciously, are born. Sixty-eight years of a village life had come on heavy wooden shoes into this new land, lingered for a while, and feared everything save the past sixty-eight years.

These paused, leaned upon the last milestone, and said:

"Of all that, there is nothing we have longed for, save a little peace within the walls of a house."

And the Angel who had seized upon these years, had borne them to the seven hells of God, bewildered with noise, distracted with visions, and dragging their quiet records, upon the white pages of which everything was scrawled with heavy red strokes.

Paris! The city filled him with a round of apprehensions, numberless thoughts which he tried to suppress, but which reached forth, fingering the days to come, with the timid touch of the old—for misfortune fed upon all his hopes. Once a carriage grazed him; another time he was given a counterfeit coin; there was a drawer in the bureau which could not be opened for a week at a stretch; the stove would neither heat the soup nor keep its fire, and the light from the window, when skies were grey, could not penetrate the panes, and died there in distress.

Much has been said of the arrival of the young man in Paris, who climbs the hill in the morning, buoyed up by millions of hopes, sees at his feet the shock of all the civilizations of France,

towers above them, and smiles at the havoc, like a captain of twenty years. Much has been sung of the first steps of the young adventurer who falls upon this Mistress, presses her to his heart, and utters the cry of a creator, launching a world. Those empty places in the heart have been described, where emotions hitherto unknown find refuge; that first conquest, too, has been related, which becomes a part of oneself, and passes into the blood like added strength.

It was much worse: he dared not even move his limbs. At home, he had at least the wood-box, the clothes-press, a cupboard, a mirror which he did not use, but which hung on the wall like a piece of furniture exceeding his needs, and he had also the attic, the extinguished forge, the courtyard, five or six rabbits, whose heads he stroked while they flattened back their ears, and the whole of a life already long, wherein each day bears the imprint of the one before, and links the human heart to its home.

He thought of the steps he might be taking—here, there, in the street, and beside the bench; the possibilities of the streets with his refuse wheelbarrow, and the days of the road-making at the beginning of autumn, when he would halt in the midst of his spading to breathe that sweet

air of the fields which fanned his brow. There were also all his acquaintances, who gave him a greeting, and upon whom his mind rested with familiar thoughts of sixty years. There peace and life lived leisurely as neighbours, having time for themselves, and men knew all that they needed to know of the truths of work and death.

How foolish he had been! One word, one twist of the tongue is not dishonour, and for only that, he might have returned to the Charity Bureau, he might be walking now as he once had walked, and might say, while musing upon his neighbours:

"Human life is made up of these even steps from the baking-pan to the bed, and these people, like myself, will die one day, having known happiness."

Men are less evil than one imagines, and to live is as simple as the saying of six words: "Please give me something to eat."

Jean returned in the evening, bearing in the folds of his garments some bread of the city, and if only because he went out, his soul was different, his life remote.

"Well, my friend, what have you been doing to-day?"

Perdrix felt a slight curiosity and a kind of

fear now, which he forgot only when Jean talked of his days hidden away in the offices like hollow parallelepipeds.

Three months after their arrival came the day of reckoning. To celebrate New Year's Day, Jean had committed a crime: children seem to imagine they can pluck gold pieces out of their hearts. He kept back twenty francs of his month's salary, saying: "Ah ha! I shall play the young man!" And straightway he purchased a pair of laced shoes, which he brought up from the hotel office that morning.

"Here is your New Year's gift, Monsieur!"

The old man untied the package, exclaiming:

"You were wrong, my boy, to spend your money. Why, now, a pair of sabots would have showed the same thought. Or if you wished absolutely to give me something, you need only have bought a cigar for two sous."

He found that no pair of shoes could be worn on his feet, which had grown so tender that only the heavy sabots did not hurt them. He was accustomed to the cushions of hard wood. It was precisely these twenty sous which were lacking at the close of each month. The three hundred francs were at an end.

"If it were not for the shoes," thought Perdrix,

"there would be no difficulty in paying the rent."

Their affairs went on apace, and each day diminished the pile of heavy sous. One imagines in the country, where a field of potatoes flourishes behind the house, that a hundred francs would procure all the pleasures of the appetite, and one speaks of them with that dense ignorance which is fed upon the vegetables of one's own garden.

Perdrix struggled for a whole month, omitted the *café au lait* in the morning, the larded veal at noon, cooked pots of beans, where the spoon went in like a stake on heavy ground, and gave to the evening soup such delicious thickness of bread that it stuffed his stomach to the full. He scolded himself for an old glutton, never satisfied, and abused his appetite with the anger of a man insulted. The stove devoured all the money, and two days before the January pay-day they had dry bread for all their meals.

One afternoon, when the weather was less severe, he tried to let the fire go out, but at the end of an hour the cold had so penetrated his feet and knees that he felt himself growing numb. He had to squander paper and wood to relight the fire, and then berated himself for a stupid old fool, because he need only have wrapped his legs in a coverlet.

Jean, thin as he was, did not seem aware of their need when he turned the key in the lock each evening and entered the room. He ate whatever was given to him, laughed softly, and one might have said he did not use his stomach, but rejoiced in life from the moment he opened his eyes. In his heart was a spring of fine emotions, overflowing and bathing him, and his brow was a pleasant land of fair slopes and valleys. One evening Perdrix reasoned with him after supper, the time for reflections:

"You are too good, my poor child; that is how I look at you. You are so good that no one will be afraid to hurt you. I have known wicked men. You draw near to them like sheep to a thornbush, and that is why the wicked will spin the wool that you bear. You have endured things that no one but you would ever have endured, and you have done it without complaint, like the good Lord himself. I wonder, since I must go some day, if you will not take other misfortunes on your shoulders. But think it over; if you have been given claws . . . Yet why say anything? You are afraid to breathe, for fear of troubling—what?—a shadow . . ."

Later Jean recalled these words, but now he laughed, answering:

"Since you are my nursemaid . . ."

Perdrix went out one evening in early February, about ten minutes to six. He had wished to remain in his room until the last moment, in order to drain his last drop of wine. Entering the hotel office, he laid down the key, saying:

"Please tell the lad not to be anxious."

It was his first venture out into Paris. He crossed a bridge, taking care for the traffic, and was only reassured while keeping to the sidewalk of the quay. The lighted gas-jets, the stores along the other sidewalk and, above all, the wine-merchants' shops, seemed to symbolize all Paris, and shut up man between their rows. Great tram-cars passed, following the curves of the street, with a force that embodied the life of cities and sent the numberless cabs whirling to each side, as a boat ploughs down a river. The hooting horns answered one another, wheels rolled over the pavements, sometimes cries rose above the noise of a thousand blended voices, and feet went running, the jumping-jack leaps of pedestrians mingled with the movements of vehicles, and from the endless streets beyond the houses could be heard a sound like the roar of a wounded animal. Life sprang from the very stones, like

the swarming of a tribe of ants; it bordered the rectangular buildings, and crawled away to the horizon, where the sky glowed like a forge.

He bumped into groups of three or four pedestrians, and could not understand how they could go abreast and keep up a conversation in the streets, where walking itself was a labour.

One of them asked him:

"Where did you come from, my clever man?"

And turning back to answer: "Insolent fellow!" he saw them laughing.

He felt insulted and shaken; his spirit was failing him, the sound of his sabots rang above the other noises and pounded upon his brain. He was a droll sight with his smock and spectacles. Street urchins shouted at him: "Hé! look who comes, his honour the Mayor!" but he was far away from them, in the little town of his sixty-eight years, with its three thousand souls; it moved with him, and he led it gently, for it counted upon him. Happiness ended there, life was now cowardice, life was the bread of others.

Sometimes he paused, like a questing dog, chose a place—five or six places. He walked slowly and ruminated upon his last thoughts, with an emotion which did him good, as if he had eaten them.

At the highest point of the Pont de l'Alma he gave a last look, decided that he had gone far enough, and turned back. The air was damp, and one could easily catch cold on the banks of the Seine. His returning steps led him to a brightly lighted quarter near the Pont de la Concorde, but as he walked on, about eight o'clock, a kindly silence of trees fell around him. Now he no longer dared to look at the water. Ah! he knew what it was like! He wished to ask his way from a passer-by, in order not to follow the river, but he could not remember the name of the quay. He longed to sit down upon a bench to rest, and he also wished to walk fast, because he was tired. Suddenly he noticed a little garden, and far above, on the bridge, the statue of a man on horseback. He saw all this by chance; he was at the Pont-Neuf. Bending his steps in that direction, he turned into rue Henri IV, and through an entrance descended a flight of stairs, and crossed the square. Weariness urged him on, pressing five fingers on the base of his neck, and pushed him without his volition: "Come along, old comrade." A heavy iron ring for mooring the boats lay in his path and, approaching the edge, he did not see it. He stumbled, and since he had started, gave a push to the right and fell quite

simply, without even having done it on purpose, into the kindly Seine, which passes through Paris, and into which he had longed to fall.

The bargemen who found him the next day said:

"Here is a chap who wanted to see what he was doing. He did not take off his glasses."

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